



Special History Study:
Art and the American
Conservation Movement

by Robert L. McGrath

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller
National Historical Park

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National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
Boston, 2001



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	II
List of Illustrations	III
Foreword	V
Acknowledgments	VI
Executive Summary	VII
Introduction: The Role of Art Collecting in the Nineteenth Century	1
I. Description and Evaluation of the Art Collection	
The New York Collection	14
The Woodstock Collection	16
Comparison of the New York and Woodstock Collections	21
The Roles of Frederick and Julia Billings in the Formation of the Collections	23
II. Nineteenth Century American Landscape Painting and the Environmental Movement	
John Ruskin and the “Mirror of Nature”	32
The Origins of American Environmentalism	33
Artists and the Environmental Movement	34
Art, Language and the Invention of Yosemite Valley and Yellowstone National Park	37
Art, Railroads and the National Park Movement	41
Albert Bierstadt and the Victorian Imagination	43
Art and the Adirondack Northwoods	45
Art and the White Mountains: The Invention of Scenery	49
The Art of Protest	52
The Mountain of the Holy Cross: the Kingdom of God in America	55
Art and the Landscape of Tourism	58
Abbott Thayer and the Grand Monadnock	60
Art and Acadia: the Last Stand of Monumentalism	65
From Monumentalism to Environmentalism: The Everglades National Park	65
Art Versus Nature: The Politics of Representation and Environmentalism	66
The Billingses’ Relationship to the Conservation Movement: Art and Literature	67
III. Selected Works from the Art Collection:	
Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park	82
IV. Bibliography	121

List of Illustrations

Cover: Albert Bierstadt, *Cathedral Rock, Yosemite*, (1870), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Fig. 1: Frédéric Rondel, *A Hunting Party in the Woods/In the Adirondac, N.Y. State* (1856), The Adirondack Museum.

Fig. 2: William James Stillman, *The Philosopher's Camp in the Adirondacks* (1858), Concord Free Public Library.

Fig. 3: James David Smillie after John Frederick Kensett, *Mount Washington from Sunset Hill, North Conway* (1851), Private Collection.

Fig. 4: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Twilight on Hunter Mountain* (1866), Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago.

Fig. 5: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Scribner's Pasture* (c. 1860), The Dayton Art Institute.

Fig. 6: Charles Lewis Heyde, *North Williston, Vermont* (c. 1855-1865), Shelburne Museum of Art.

Fig. 7: James Hope, *Bird Mountain Castleton, Vermont* (c. 1860), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 8: William Henry Jackson, *Holy Cross* (c. 1930), Scotts Bluff National Monument.

Fig. 9: William Henry Jackson, *Photographing the Mountain of the Holy Cross* (c. 1930), Scottsbluff National Monument.

Fig. 10: William Hahn, *Yosemite Valley from Glacier Point* (1874), California Historical Society.

Fig. 11: Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Mount Monadnock* (1909), Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.

Fig. 12: "The Cruelties of Fashion—Fine Feathers Make Fine Birds," from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (November 10, 1883).

Fig. 13: Barry Faulkner, *Men of Monadnock* (1950), Fleet Bank, Keene, New Hampshire.

Fig. 14: "The Northern Pacific Jubilee: Driving the Golden Spike," from *Harper's Weekly* (September 24, 1883).

Fig. 15: "The Completion of the Northern Pacific Railway—Driving the Last Spike at the Point of Junction of the Eastern and Western Sections, Sixty Miles West of Helena, Sept. 8—From a Sketch by Farny," in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (September 22, 1883).

Fig. 16: John William Hill, *High Bridge: Harlem River* (c. 1848-1851), Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.

Fig. 17: Frederic A. Bridgman, *On the Road to Biskra* (1878), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Fig. 18: Samuel Colman, *Arab Caravanary* (1879), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Back Cover: The Mansion as it appears today, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Foreword

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park is the only national park to tell the story of conservation history and the evolving nature of land stewardship in America. The Park was the boyhood home of George Perkins Marsh, author of *Man and Nature* (1864) and one of the first global environmental thinkers. In 1869 Frederick Billings, strongly influenced by Marsh, established a progressive country estate on the former Marsh farm. Billings's granddaughter, Mary French Rockefeller, and her husband, conservationist Laurence S. Rockefeller, made a gift of the 550-acre forest and their residence to establish the Park in 1992. The Park continues that tradition of land stewardship, and also preserves and interprets the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller Mansion and its extensive art collection illustrating the influence of art and artists on the 19th century conservationist movement.

As a new national park we have been pleased to undertake this study. The landscape art collection, which is integral to the park property and the human histories of the estate's inhabitants, presents a unique opportunity to take a fresh look at the role of art in the development of the American conservation movement in its earliest years. Our interpretation of the park's history and significance is immeasurably enriched by the generous gift of these works of art, and by the insightful scholarship Prof. McGrath brings to this study. We are grateful to him, and to Nancy Waters and Gay Vietzke of the Northeast Museum Services Center, National Park Service, for bringing this handsome and informative Special History Study to fruition.

Rolf Diamant, Superintendent



Thomas Cole, *Niagra Falls* (c.1830), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Acknowledgments

It is a truism of art historical inquiry that the discrete spheres of art and life were hygienically separated during the Gilded Age. Only in the modern period, according to the canonic account, were they reintegrated. While there is strong evidence to support this assertion, especially with regard to the figural arts, there is an equally compelling argument that nature and its representation were never more closely allied than during the nineteenth century. It is our contention that the art of landscape painting, in which the Woodstock mansion abounds, was instrumental in shaping the Billingses' perception of the world and in stimulating their conservation ethic. Hudson River School paintings of the primal American wilderness, together with French Barbizon images of benign agriculture and managed forestry, provided aesthetic models that were bodied forth in the mansion estate and the Mount Tom forest plantation. In addition, the organization of "parks," both national and urban, which were in turn the result of pictorial formulas for conferring value upon landscape, played a decisive role in the layout of the carriage roads and prospects created throughout the estate. In a word, art was central to the vision which Frederick and Julia Billings sought to embody in their Woodstock estate.

Many individuals have assisted me in the preparation of this Special History Study for the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, but none more so than the amiable Janet Houghton, Curator of Collections. Always accessible and willing to go the extra mile in exploring archives, looking at artworks and discoursing about an era into which she has special insight, Janet is an ideal custodian of artifacts and ideas. Nancy H. Waters, Senior Curator at the Northeast Museum Services Center in Boston, together with her able colleague

Gay E. Vietzke, served jointly as Project Managers, reading drafts, offering advice and soothing multiple anxieties. Paul Weinbaum, Lead Historian of the Boston Support Office, provided exasperatingly close readings of drafts, causing me to rethink and reformulate no end of conventional wisdom. All of the above were especially helpful in obliging me to reform my often hyperventilated, post-modern, academic rhetoric, a corrective for which I am most grateful.

Barbara Reed, the eminently gifted librarian of Dartmouth's Sherman Art Library, provided bibliographic services above and beyond the siren call of duty while that most estimable institution, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, is recognized for a most useful collaboration. Finally, my beloved wife, Mary, indispensable companion and research assistant, deserves credit for countless hours spent in the archival trenches and for no end of stimulating discussions about the vagaries of the Gilded Age. Above all, she is to be commended for her calculated displays of interest and indifference to this project, sufficient always to engender my renewed intellectual exertions.

Robert L. McGrath



Attributed to Jean Antoine Theodore Gudin, *Stormy Seascape* (n.d.), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Executive Summary



Robert Crannell Minor,
Evening (c.1882), Marsh-
Billings-Rockefeller
National Historical Park.

This Special History Study focuses on the nineteenth century art collection housed in the mansion of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont. It consists of an interpretive essay on the role of collecting in Victorian America as well as a catalogue of individual artworks acquired by Frederick and Julia Billings during their lifetimes. Also catalogued are the major nineteenth century landscape paintings collected by Laurance and Mary Rockefeller during the twentieth century, partially to honor the spirit of the Woodstock collection. The catalogue is confined to those oil paintings, which bear most directly on the park's primary theme: the development of the American conservation movement.

In addition to the description and evaluation of the Woodstock collection, the study contains an interpretive essay concerning the no-longer-extant art collection in the Billingses' New York city home for which an 1890s inventory exists. The principal findings of the section are twofold: the New York collection was relatively conventional, conforming with the practices of the majority of wealthy collectors of the High Victorian period, while the Woodstock collection, with its central body of American landscape paintings, was more

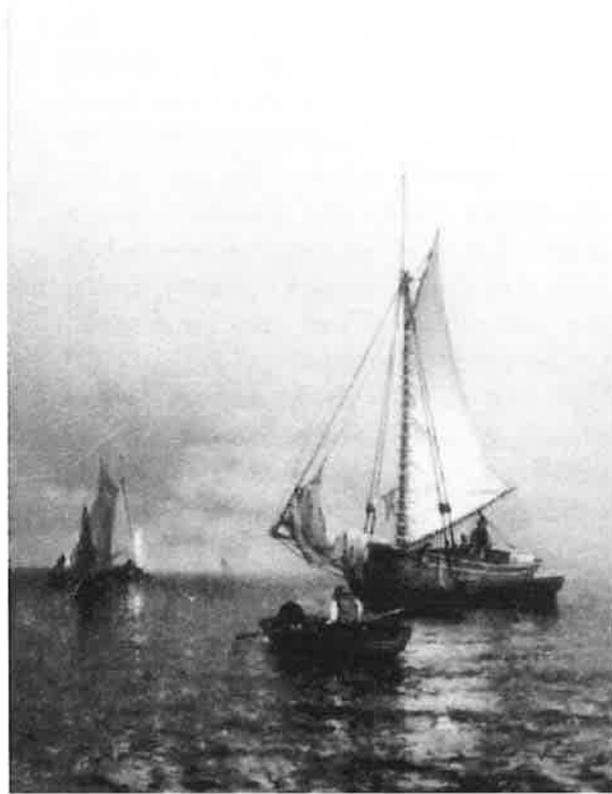
idiosyncratic, partially reflecting the Billingses' interest in rural ideals and conservation issues. Another important finding concerns the display of artworks in the Woodstock mansion. With the exception of Vermont's St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, no repository of nineteenth century American art retains its original configuration. While the Woodstock mansion and its collections have been substantially altered, especially during the 1950s, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller retains to a high degree much of the "aura" of the high Victorian era.

Part Two of the study addresses the influence of nineteenth century American landscape painting, photography and nature writing upon the environmental movement. The role of British philosopher John Ruskin in formulating a complex synthesis of art, religion and nature is explored, together with the influence of such artistic figures as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Carleton Watkins and William Henry Jackson, in shaping the Romantic sensibility towards nature. The influence of "scenic monumentalism" is related to the formation of the western parks Yosemite and Yellowstone, while such diverse cultural constructs as the "picturesque" and the "sublime" are brought into varying relationship with the Adirondack northwoods of New York state, the White

Mountains of New Hampshire, the Catskills and the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The claim that images generate ideas about nature and determine the values that we place upon it (as well as the manner in which nature is perceived) is central to this discussion. This account also includes an analysis of the more direct influence of several important cultural figures upon public policy with regard to specific geographical sites: among others, painters Abbott Thayer (Mount Monadnock) and Frederic Edwin Church (Acadia National Park), art historian Charles Eliot Norton (Niagara Falls) and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (Yosemite). Frederick Billings' responses to these diverse cultural forces in the formation of the Woodstock estate provide a terminus for this essay. The role of culture in shaping his

sensibilities is discussed, with the tentative conclusion that Barbizon paintings together with the landscape designs of Frederick Law Olmsted and Robert Morris Copeland provided the cultural vision for the estate, while the religious sanction of Horace Bushnell and utilitarian views of George Perkins Marsh accounted for its conception and use.

For Frederick Billings, one of the age's foremost captains of industry, the connections between his business practices, the Victorian idea of conservation and the acquisition of art, were nearly seamless. The development of transcontinental railroads and the creation of national parks were sequential and inseparable. The parks were developed for tourists and the railroads became the means of access. Art was the sign that closed the circle.



Arthur Quartley, *Boats BeCALMED* (1879), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Introduction: The Role of Art Collecting in the Nineteenth Century

Art collecting, the world over, has been a compound of numerous motives including pride of possession and greed, desire for social prestige, rivalry with other collectors and, not infrequently, genuine love for the objects collected. The British art critic Anna Jameson, whom the young Julia Parmlly met in London in 1854¹, succinctly articulated the value of art for her Victorian readership: "Pictures are for use, for solace, for ornament, for parade—as invested wealth, as an appendage of rank. Some people love pictures as they love friends; some, as they love music; some, as they love money. And the collectors of pictures take rank accordingly."² In addition to these qualities, Anglo-American art collecting during the Victorian age was driven by a set of moral, spiritual and therapeutic imperatives that were unique to the period.³ To this list can further be appended the foundational premise of Victorian collecting: art should mirror life, but its content needs to be carefully edited to disallow disturbing or unpleasant intrusions. The extent to which Julia and Frederick Billings were familiar with, and responded to, these various aspirations and injunctions can be inferred from their education, their library, their friends, diary entries and, most importantly, the collection itself.

By any reckoning art collecting in America between the end of the Civil War and the close of the century was more avidly pursued and more endowed with significance than at any time before or since. There has never been a period when art mattered more than between the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, the rough parameters of the Billingses' careers as collectors.⁴ To be an artist, an art dealer, a

critic or a collector was to engage in an activity invested with significant moral and social purpose. For the first time in American history art, together with the house in which it was displayed, became major signifiers of status and upward social mobility. In the words of Harriet Spofford, an unreconstructed arbiter of Victorian sensibility, the study of the home and its furnishings

is as important as the study of politics; for the private home is the foundation of the public state, subtle and unimagined influences molding the men who mold the state. . . . Just as there is no more certain means of gauging a man's social position than by discovering what manner of womankind belongs to him, so there is no better means of measuring his intellectual or artistic culture than by examining his library . . . or the arrangements of his house.⁵

Clarence Cook, another self-anointed adviser on domestic affairs, was even more emphatic about the role of art in the household. For Cook, the Parlor was "an important agent in the education of life. . . . It is no trifling matter, whether we hang poor pictures on our walls or good ones, whether we select a fine cast or a second-rate one. We might almost as well say it makes no difference whether the people we live with are first-rate or second-rate."⁶

It is important to stress these distinctions between the Victorian age and more recent times when aesthetic considerations gained primacy over social and moral didacticism. One of the principal legacies of early Romanticism to the Gilded Age was the conviction that art was a prime agent of

instruction and moral uplift. To this end, art was understood to be reflective rather than performative, the artist more a mediator than a creator. Realism, the construction of readable images grounded in the world of perceptions, constituted the probity of Victorian art. In collapsing the boundary between pictorial delineation and optical reality, the artist provided tangible evidence to the buyer of painstaking labor, “pride in the work ethic and money well-spent.”⁷

While not absent from the beliefs of earlier historical periods, the notion that art was purifying, redemptive and reflective of spiritual values took hold with unusual intensity during the nineteenth century. Invested with a sticky compound of Victorian sentimentality and Romantic exoticism, art projected a sanitized vision of social harmony while providing examples of individual and collective piety. These convictions were imparted to Victorian Americans most directly through the writings of British philosophers Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Ruskin.⁸

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the first to break with the tradition of English empiricism to argue that knowledge and understanding could be grasped intuitively through imaginative qualities that transcend both logic and experience. An intimate of Wordsworth and a major influence on Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Coleridge linked art to nature and religion through a complex fusion of aesthetics with spirituality.⁹ Civilization was for Coleridge grounded in “cultivation,” and in the “harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity.” According to a recent historian, “culture had for Coleridge almost a literally agricultural meaning: a process of sowing, nurturing and gradual, successive harvesting.”¹⁰ The young Frederick Billings was introduced to Coleridge’s thought while a student at the University of Vermont. His friend and mentor, Reverend James Marsh (a cousin of

George Perkins Marsh) taught a senior year course in philosophy which was centered around the writings of Coleridge, several of whose American editions Marsh had edited.¹¹ In this connection, it is surely no accident that Frederick’s first art purchase was an engraved portrait of the famed English philosopher.¹² This portrait hung in the library of the Woodstock mansion throughout Frederick Billings’ lifetime, though in recent times it has been relegated to the attic.

The role of John Ruskin in shaping the sensibilities of Frederick and Julia Billings is more problematic. On the one hand, almost no educated Victorian could escape the critical theories of Ruskin, arguably the most influential writer in western history on the nexus between art and morality; on the other, his major writings are absent from the Billings’ Woodstock library.¹³ Ruskin’s influence, however attenuated, can be inferred from the character and quality of the art collection. The celebrated Ruskinian apothegm “Art, the Interpreter of Nature; Nature, the Interpreter of God” could well be inscribed over the Billingses’ art collection as well as most of the major collections of the era. A distinguishing characteristic of the Billingses’ collection is the absence of “Old Master” paintings, either as originals or in didactic copies.¹⁴ This apparently deliberate omission conforms with Ruskin’s injunction—an injunction widely observed by many Victorians—to buy only the work of modern painters, especially landscapes.¹⁵ Only towards the end of the century, with the emergence of collectors like Henry Clay Frick and Isabella Stewart Gardner, did “Old Masters” become the norm rather than the exception.

In the period between the Centennial and the Columbian Expositions, the art market underwent a dramatic change. Up until the mid-1870s the primary locale for the sale of artworks was the artist’s studio or the exhibitions of such institutions as New

York's National Academy of Design. From roughly 1825 until about 1875, the work of American artists was avidly collected. During the last quarter of the century, however, art dealers began increasingly to take over the operations of the market and to introduce a taste for European art. A notice in *Harper's Weekly* of 8 February, 1879 makes clear that New Yorkers were beginning to rely on dealers for contemporary art:

The galleries of the principal picture dealers of New York offer many attractions this winter to the lovers of art. . . . At Goupil's, Kohn's, Avery's, Schaus's . . . the visitor will find quiet, well-lighted, pleasant galleries, filled with pictures by artists of world-wide fame; some by foreign masters, who, like European authors, find in the New World an appreciation as broad, as cultivated, and as liberal as that which they enjoy at home.¹⁶

The art collecting of Frederick and Julia Billings largely occurred during this shift and reflects practices both before and after the cultural watershed of the 1876 Centennial.

As a general rule during the Billingses' lifetimes American landscapes were commissioned directly from the artists, while European paintings were acquired through dealers. On occasion the New York dealer Louis Lanthier, whose gallery was especially frequented by the Billingses, acted as agent for them at auctions of art collections. Allowing for a degree of hybridity and crossover, the Woodstock house might best be characterized as pre-Centennial and the New York collection as post-Centennial cultural constructions. Another way of conceptualizing this divide would be to reconfigure it as a dialogue between the country and the city. European art dominated the New York collection while American landscapes provide the principal

theme of Woodstock.

Like many art collections created before and, to a lesser extent, after the Civil War, the Billingses' holdings, especially those housed in Vermont, were dedicated as "a shrine to American nature."¹⁷ Landscape paintings by Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, John Frederick Kensett and other luminaries of the Hudson River School formed the centerpiece of the collection. In contrast to and in conformity with emergent Victorian taste, the New York collection was largely composed of European paintings. To wealthy industrialists and others, the acquisition of paintings of the national landscape (i.e. the Northeast and the West) constituted a patriotic duty. In emulation of English aristocrats who filled the walls of their estates with family portraits, Americans, as a function of identity formation (a shift from face to place) were drawn, *faute de mieux*, to topographic landscape images. "There is little that is exclusively American which can be used for art material," a Gilded Age critic asserted, "if we set aside our magnificent scenery."¹⁸ If, as for Frederick and Julia, these canvases served as a form of pictorial tourism, replications of places visited, either for work or pleasure, so much the better.¹⁹

For most collectors of the period paintings of the American landscape held, above all, associations with "the creative powers of the Almighty."²⁰ Icons of a broadly formulated reverence for nature, these detailed, factual canvases functioned as devotional imagery, providing transparent access to God's purposes. Sacralized as it was progressively nationalized, the narrative of the American land was scripted in "The Great Book of Nature," one of the most pervasive fictions to which any nation has ever subscribed.²¹ Even the very act of looking at a landscape was considered virtuous, an uplifting mix of piety and patriotism. In an essay entitled "Scenery and the Mind," published in one of the most influential texts of the nineteenth century, the Reverend Elias Magoon averred

that “in viewing magnificent scenes, the soul, expanded and sublimed, is imbued with a spirit of divinity and appears, as it were, associated with the Deity himself.”²² To which assertions, the mid-century critic James Jackson Jarves added the helpful reminder that nature was “the creation of the one God—his sensuous image and revelation, through the investigation of which by science or its representation by art, men’s hearts are lifted toward him.”²³

Simultaneously eliciting both patriotic and votive meanings, panoramic views of the Hudson River, the Adirondacks and the White Mountains, together with paintings of Yosemite, Yellowstone and the volcanoes of the Pacific Northwest, were understood to embody the unprecedented virtues of “Nature’s Nation.”²⁴ In the view of the Reverend Magoon, “the diversified landscapes of our country exert no slight influence in creating our character as individuals and in confirming our destiny as a nation.”²⁵ If, for a collector like Frederick Billings, views of Yosemite Valley or Mount Hood intimated the political imperatives of “Manifest Destiny,” they also could be assimilated under the rubric of religious painting.²⁶ Spiritual and political exceptionalism, the unique covenant that God had made with Americans, was rendered visible by these paintings of an unspoiled national Eden. The natural abundance of a Christian Democracy, as evidenced by images of the land, linked parlor gentility to public polity. The landscape, first sanctified on canvas, was projected onto the consciousness of the nation’s lawmakers, eventuating in the world’s first acts of nature conservation.

As over and against claims on behalf of Victorian spirituality, recent neo-Marxist accounts of the meaning of landscape have set “the ritualized consumption of nature” alongside the urban promenade and the scenic tour as “social arenas for acting out the distinction between the polite and the

vulgar.”²⁷ The ability to appreciate landscape as an aesthetic commodity, according to Dona Brown, “emerged as a defining attribute of an urban middle-class market oriented public.”²⁸ Paralleling the rise of this urban taste for the landscape was, in Brown’s view, a related devaluation of the landscape of use.²⁹ Without discrediting the role of landscape appreciation in the formation of both class and regional identity, it is difficult to assess the degree of complicity of the Billingses with such purported mental and economic transactions.³⁰ For Frederick and Julia, art appears to have stimulated, rather than repressed, their interest in the working landscape. At Woodstock aesthetics were never wholly and “hygienically separated from utilitarian ambitions” or the realm of production.³¹ In short, landscape art structured the perception and provided the vision of the natural environment that the Billingses desired to achieve at the estate and the forest plantation.

Another challenging ethical question for the modern scholar is posed by environmental historian William Cronon, who claims that the Victorian habit of viewing and conceptualizing the landscape as “scenery” was a perverse form of anthropocentrism and sentimentality. In his critical formulation, landscape art and the appreciation of nature that it served to engender—especially as it eventuated in national parks—should be viewed as another aspect of European colonialist practice.³² While these post-modern positions are engaging, they cast little direct light upon the artistic culture of the nineteenth century. For the Victorian collector, images of the land also functioned as therapy. As simulacra for nature, landscape views were claimed to offer ministrations to urbanites made weary by the unavoidable stress and dislocations of modern life. A mid-century writer for New York’s American Art Union expressed this view with unusual bluntness:

To the inhabitants of cities . . . a painted landscape is almost essential to preserve a healthy tone to the spirits, lest they forget in the wilderness of bricks which surrounds them the pure delights of nature and a country life. Those who cannot afford a seat in the country to refresh their wearied spirits may at least have a country seat in their parlors; a bit of landscape with a green tree, a distant hill, or low-roofed cottage—some of these simple objects which all men find so refreshing to their spirits after being long pent up in dismal streets and in the haunts of business.³³

The painter Asher Durand also conveniently advocated the consoling pleasures of landscape painting for “our men of fortune.” “To the rich merchant or capitalist,” he intoned,

on his return home, after completion of his daily task of drudgery—his dinner partaken, and himself disposed of in his favorite arm-chair—with one or more faithful landscapes before him, and making no greater effort than to look into the picture instead of on it . . . many a fair vision of forgotten days will animate the canvas, pleasant reminiscences and grateful emotions will spring up at every step, and care and anxiety will retire far behind him.³⁴

Landscape painting was understood to be especially soothing to those who, like Frederick Billings, suffered from “neurasthenia” (the Victorian equivalent of today’s “chronic fatigue syndrome”), a nervous disorder specifically afflicting “Anglo-Saxon Americans . . . especially those in the higher walks of life.”³⁵ Nervousness, according to this account—“the master trait of the modern American”—was both a disease and an emblem of refinement; its chief cause modern, industrial

society with its restless energy and rapid forms of communication and transportation. In the empurpled rhetoric of Victorian therapy, art was understood to “no longer appeal to the imagination, to sentiment, or to the intellect. It plays directly on the nerves, the chief possession or affliction of these restless, modern days.”³⁶ Frederick Billings’ purported mentor, George Perkins Marsh, devoted a sizable passage in *Man and Nature* to “The Instability of American Life,” pleading for “some abatement in the restless love of change which characterizes us, and makes us almost a nomade [sic] rather than a sedentary people.”³⁷

At a regional level, paintings of the New England countryside were felt to embody qualities of a democratic, rural utopia. Like the salubrious return to the soil, institutionalized by such activities as northern New England’s “Old Home Week,” images of the ancestral homestead and farmland were viewed as a resource for the nation’s political health.³⁸ For many Americans scenes of rural life, then as now, symbolized the traditional values under siege in the cities. In this connection the landscape of New England “was imagined as a kind of underground cultural aquifer that fed the nation’s springs of political courage, personal independence and old-fashioned virtue.”³⁹ George Perkins Marsh gave voice to precisely this pictorial mode of the pastoral-picturesque when he described Vermont as “the unrivaled landscapes unfolded from our every hill, where lake, and island, and mountain and rock, and well-tilled fields, and evergreen wood, and purling brook, and cheerful home of man are presented at due distance and in fairest proportion.”⁴⁰

In addition to images of the national and regional landscape, collectors (especially during the decades of the 1870s and 1880s) also avidly consumed paintings of the French countryside by the Barbizon masters. Corot, Diaz, Rousseau, Daubigny and Troyon, all prominently featured in the front Parlor of

the Billingses' Madison Avenue home, were considered the most advanced painters of their time.⁴¹ Their works, according to auction records between 1876 and 1883, brought the highest prices alongside the canvases of such respected French Academics as Adolf Bouguereau, Jean-Léon Gérôme and Jean-Georges Vibert (all represented in the New York collection).⁴² What, it might be asked, linked these Old World images to the New World? How could paintings of French peasants in pastoral settings hold meaning for industrial capitalists and railroad barons?⁴³ What diverse cultural processes inspired the genteel, urban gaze of Victorian Americans to fall favorably upon peasant laborers? At one level Barbizon painting, together with its American progeny, can be understood to offer post-Civil War Americans a respite from the dislocations of conflicted nationhood and rapid industrialization. Unlike the panoramic spectacles of the primal American wilderness, the art of Barbizon provided an intimate retreat into the rural past, an escape from the present, and a sense of permanence provided by contact with the soil.⁴⁴ Safe havens from the troubled present, the rural was invoked to counter the industrial. In sympathetic accord with the verbal ruminations of George Perkins Marsh, Barbizon painting intimated redemption from the restless energy of the machine through a return to the land. In this world of the imagination, life is renewed and redeemed by manual labor and husbandry. In dimly lit forest interiors sheep graze peacefully, cattle follow gentle woodland paths and frugal peasants gather fallen branches.⁴⁵ Nostalgic evocations of an agrarian past, to which many captains of industry like Frederick Billings hoped someday to return, the pastoral inventions of Barbizon artists offered timeless reassurance in the face of modern uncertainty.⁴⁶ Perhaps above all, they offered the consolations of "invented traditions" in a period when rapid transformation was

weakening or destroying social patterns.⁴⁷ In the words of historian Laura Meixner, the public reception of Barbizon was

a democratic conversation held among the many Americans who looked past their own borders to clarify their vision of themselves. In their plain view of things [Barbizon painting] revealed the paradoxes inherent in France and America, fraternity and rivalry, ideology and utopia, tradition and transformation, adversarial politics and republican faith, nationhood and individuality. From the unresolved contradictions that bound French art to American society came the truths awakening ordinary American people to their own sense of cultural possibility.⁴⁸

While it is not possible to assert the claim with certainty, the image of Barbizon, as both a place and an aesthetic ideal, appears to have played a significant role in shaping the sylvan/pastoral vision of Frederick and Julia Billings. The forest of Fontainebleau, a product of "wise forestry" and controlled silviculture since the time of Louis XIV, may, for example, have served as a model for the Mount Tom plantation. Likewise Barbizon's mythic Fairy's Pond (*Mare aux Fées*), a pilgrimage site for all visitors, may also have provided the inspiration for The Pogue. The carriage roads and scenic outlooks on Mount Tom, created by Frederick Billings, seemingly echo the romantic itineraries created by Claude Francois Denecourt during the 1830s and 1840s in the woods of Fontainebleau.⁴⁹ Even the model farm, with its herds of grazing sheep and cattle, provides a kind of reenactment of those idyllic paintings by Corot, Rousseau and Daubigny which once decorated the walls of the New York home.

To the extent that painted canvases replicate social practices and physical realities, the art of Barbizon was more

actualized than any previous landscape in the history of art. In narrowing the gap between painted studies “direct from nature” and the finished, studio canvas, Barbizon artists helped to sunder the traditional boundaries between nature and art. Giving a greater voice to nature in the dialogue with art, they engendered a vision of unity that could be realized in the landforms themselves. The Woodstock estate, born out of the Billingses’ cultural imagination, was a response not only to memory and a desire for spiritual renewal, but to an image structured by art. The harmonious integration of forest, farm, garden and home realized at Woodstock reprised the history of “domesticated woodlands” descended from Renaissance Europe. Whether conceptualized as a private aristocratic estate or as a quasi-public “Arcadia for the people,” Woodstock, as the seat of ancestral virtue, was the product of centuries’ old European land management and aesthetic vision.⁵⁰

Further informed by the pragmatic-cum-aesthetic views of George Perkins Marsh, the forest and fields of the Woodstock estate were to be the Billingses’ “monument.” In recognition of the role of Barbizon and its Renaissance antecedents in forming a nexus between nature and culture, three of the four paintings from the original Billings New York collection brought by Laurance Rockefeller to Woodstock in 1998 were views of the Forest of Fontainebleau. The retrospective pastoral vision of Narcisse Diaz, Jules Dupré and Charles-Emile Jacques, these intimate cabinet paintings reinforced the broader meaning of the collection. Representations of the visionary ideal bodied forth in the actualized landscape of the Billings estate, these paintings served as models of benign forestry, agrarian plenitude and social harmony.

While it is tempting to dwell upon past and present meanings imposed upon landscape paintings, we should not lose sight of the fact that Frederick and Julia were

eminent Victorians whose sensibilities were those of a privileged elite. Frederick’s acquisition of a landscape from the celebrated painter Frederic Edwin Church, the artistic transaction for which we possess the fullest and most direct evidence, reveals that he was more interested in the mundane considerations of size and cost in adorning his home than any supposed content of the work.

An unexpected genre of art, common to both the New York and Woodstock collections, was marine painting. How are we to account for the substantial number of seascapes (approximately 10% of the collections) occurring in the homes of an industrialist whose vision and wealth were derived from the continental model of American Empire? For most Americans of the period, the land rather than the sea made the strongest claims upon the national imagination; the Railroad, not the Clipper Ship, was the dominant symbol of American destiny.⁵¹ Formless and shapeless, the ocean, with its stark horizontals of sea and sky, did not adhere to the aesthetics of “picturesque” form. Nor did America’s maritime culture, embodying the past rather than the transcendent future, afford a strong counterbalance to the frontier thrust of national experience. Like fish out of water, the Billingses’ images of the sea appear to the contemporary viewer oddly decontextualized. Arguably, their possession of a large number of marine paintings can be attributed to the period’s conventions of collecting (most of the major collections of the period feature a sizable percentage of marines) or, alternatively, to Julia’s nostalgia for the summers of her youth spent at the New Jersey seashore.⁵² As many of the formative journeys of Frederick Billings’ life were by sea, it is also likely that these experiences may have provided an incentive for the marine collection. Still another likely explanation lies in Ishmael’s claim in *Moby Dick* that “meditation and water are wedded

forever.” For the Romantic imagination, the sea symbolized the idea of voyage or pilgrimage and the ships, which figure prominently in most of the Billingses’ paintings, the human soul.⁵³ As the Reverend Elias Magoon, a spokesman for the age, reminded his readers, many of whom were landlocked: “Next to mountains, the ocean has the greatest affect upon the mind.”⁵⁴

Another category of art common to most collections of the high Victorian era was narrative genre painting, European as well as American.⁵⁵ Descriptive, moralistic, sentimental and literary depictions of everyday life were enormously popular during the Gilded Age and the Billingses’ collection was illustrative of this. Victorians preferred works of art that could easily be translated into words—verbal paintings that described places, told stories, and accounted for events. According to a recent study of the period,

these canvases narrated, discovered or contrived moments, cleansed of ambiguity and confusion. Unlike the ineffable Rembrandt portrait that demands imagination and risk and may change in content from day to day as variables in the interactive process change, these paintings offered little room for interpretation. Their statements, reflecting a world viewed in terms of categories rather than possibilities, were easily read and easily discussed.⁵⁶

Socially instructive, morally charged, and emotionally consoling, these works stressed the primacy of subject matter over formal invention. The Victorian definition of a good picture would have “excluded the spatial experiments, questions of perception or the reality of flux that increasingly intrigued innovative French artists of the 1860s and 1870s. They expected artists to account for a reassuring or a romantic world, not to

inquire about the independent possibilities of formal elements.”⁵⁷ In a word, they were “pictures” before they were “paintings.”

Conceived as narratives of faith and renewal, genre paintings spoke in the pictorial vernacular of the humble poor. Both in New York and Woodstock images of pious mothers (Meyer von Bremen), Norman and Breton peasants (Alexandre Antigna, Edward Moran) slumbering babies (Sophie Gengembre Anderson), protagonists of literature (John Whetten Ehninger) and Plymouth Pilgrims (George Henry Boughton) adorned the Parlors, Hallways, Libraries and Bedrooms. In the magisterial inventory of New York, Boston and Philadelphia’s Gilded Age homes, *Artistic Houses*, genre paintings constituted about fifty percent of the documented collections.⁵⁸ In this regard, the Billingses fell slightly below the norm, though the works of the genre artists represented in their homes were among the most commonly collected.

So-called “Orientalist” paintings were also avidly sought by collectors of the period, including the Billingses.⁵⁹ After genre and landscape, depictions of the mystery and allure of the Middle East and North Africa were popular subjects, especially in France, England and the United States. While it is currently fashionable to subscribe to the argument that the vogue for these exotic canvases was a function of Imperialism, it is unlikely that they were so viewed by Americans.⁶⁰ Rather, like images of Breton peasants at toil in the fields, paintings of pre-industrial Bedouin reminded rootless, ahistorical Americans of the origins of the human race.⁶¹ In addition, scenes of Near Eastern folklife, unlike nationalist themes, were inherently aesthetic: “Boots, red shirts, log cabins, and slouch hats are not national,” claimed a leading American Orientalist painter, “they are uncivilized, repelling, ugly.”⁶² Like scenes of American Indian life, pictures of Arabs may have been inherently racist but imperialist ambitions towards

North Africa and the Near East were not part of the American agenda during the period when this imagery was most popular.⁶³ Representations of Indians, conversely, were often imperialist, often nostalgic, and frequently racist by today's moral reckoning.⁶⁴ In America Orientalist paintings most likely served as souvenirs of travel to Islamic lands, reminders of exotic places visited and sights seen. They also embodied, like Barbizon paintings, the visionary appeal of a pre-industrial society based on handicraft, barter, and primitive modes of travel.

At the dedication of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in March of 1880, an event of which Frederick and Julia were aware but did not attend,⁶⁵ trustee Joseph C. Choate welcomed visitors to the institution's "new" home in Central Park with a stirring oration:

Think of it, ye millionaires of many markets—what glory may yet be yours, if you only listen to our advice, to convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery, the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks—things which perish without the using, and which in the next financial panic shall surely shrivel like parched scrolls—into the glorified canvas of the world's masters, that shall adorn these walls for centuries. The rage of Wall Street is to hunt the philosopher's stone, to convert all baser things into gold, which is but dross: but ours is the higher ambition to convert your useless gold into things of living beauty that shall be a joy to a whole people for a thousand years.⁶⁶

It was to people of the status and stature of Frederick and Julia Billings that these exhortations were addressed. For the nature and quality of their response, we must look to the collections of art housed in New York and Woodstock.

Endnotes

¹ Mansion Box A12: *Memoirs of Julia Parmly Billings*, 4.

² Anna Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1844), 383.

³ For a balanced view of the mentality and motives of Victorian collectors see W. G. Constable, *Art Collecting in the United States: An Outline of a History* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1964).

⁴ In his groundbreaking study of the era's foremost painter, Frederic Edwin Church, David C. Huntington observed:

Few people today know the story of the role of the painted picture in national life during the years of Manifest Destiny. Yet it is one of the most interesting chapters of our artistic past. There have been few moments when it was better to be a young painter in this country. . . . In that golden era of prosperity and cultural nationalism, painting in America finally evolved into an authentic movement with well-defined aims. . . . The artist was called upon to play a vital role in the national life; he could help to unify the citizens of all quarters of the land; he could inspire patriotism. And he was paid well for his services. (David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* [New York: George Braziller, 1966], ix).

⁵ Harriet Spofford, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), 12.

⁶ Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1878), 49. Frederick Billings possessed the 1881 edition of Cook's book with an undated inscription on the first leaf in the hand of his sister-in-law, Nancy Swift Hitch Billings reading: "Frederick Billings with love from his Quaker sister."

⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 16.

⁸ The best study of the influence of Coleridge and Ruskin on American Romanticism remains Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967).

⁹ Coleridge is credited with having introduced the words "selfless" and "aesthetic" into the English language. Late in his career he repudiated the ideals of Romantic nature worship. In a letter to a friend

he wrote scornfully, "the vague misty, rather than mystic, confusion of God with the World and the accompanying nature-worship" as "the trait in Wordsworth's poetic works that I most dislike as unhealthful and denounce as contagious." *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, Vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–1971), 95.

¹⁰ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 61.

¹¹ Jane Curtis, Will Curtis and Frank Lieberman, *The World of George Perkins Marsh, America's First Conservationist and Environmentalist* (Woodstock, Vt.: The Countryman Press, 1982), 27. The authors somewhat overenthusiastically credit James Marsh with introducing Transcendentalist Philosophy to America. For a more balanced assessment of Marsh's role see Lewis S. Feuer, "James Marsh and the Conservative Transcendentalist Philosophy," *The New England Quarterly* 31 (March, 1958), 3–31.

¹² This engraving, a copy of the famous portrait of Coleridge (1814, London, National Portrait Gallery) by the American Washington Allston, was purchased by subscription in 1853.

¹³ It is important to note that we don't have the inventory of the New York City library where the writings of Ruskin may have been represented. There are, however, numerous texts by Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Woodstock mansion and these can readily serve as a conduit for many of the influential ideas of both Coleridge and Ruskin. The choice of "Queen Anne" style for the architecture of the Woodstock Mansion ultimately reverts from Henry Hudson Holly to Charles Lock Eastlake to John Ruskin and his advocacy of the style. A similar genealogy can be constructed for the landscape designs of Robert Morris Copeland.

¹⁴ While generally observing the Ruskinian injunction against the "Old Masters," the Billingses subtly subverted it by the display of engravings representing Renaissance masters in their studios and copies of Raphael Madonnas. According to the extant Inventory of circa 1891, engraved portraits of the artists *Philippe de Champaigne* and *Leonardo da Vinci* hung in the library. Also paired engravings of *Michaelangelo in His Studio* and *Raphael in His Studio* hung in the Reception Room and an engraved version of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* was in Julia's room. Engravings of Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* and *Madonna with Sleeping Jesus* were located in Laura Billings' room. All of these nineteenth century engravings are currently in storage in the attic of the Mansion, having been removed from their previous locations during the present century.

¹⁵ Macleod, 4–8, argues that the collecting of modern artists, together with the concomitant rejection of "Old Masters," was a way for the emergent English and, by extension the American, middle classes to distinguish themselves from the aristocracy.

¹⁶ John K. Howat, *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), 70.

¹⁷ William Hosley, *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 173. The collection formed by Elizabeth Colt, wife of Hartford, Connecticut gun manufacturer Samuel Colt, was willed *in toto* to the Wadsworth Athenaeum where only a small part is currently on public view. Like the Billingses' collections, the Colt collection began as a "shrine to American nature," and evolved during the 1870s and 1880s into a transatlantic dialogue between European and American pictures. As with the Billings collection, Elizabeth Colt's only purchase of an American work by an artist not living at the time was a Thomas Cole (*Landscape with a Round Temple*, c. 1832) which, like the Billingses' three Coles, was brokered by Frederic Edwin Church.

¹⁸ George Hitchcock, "The Picturesque Quality of Holland," *Scribner's Magazine*, August 1887, 163.

¹⁹ Hosley, 191, notes: "If there is an overarching theme to the art and architectural patronage of both Sam and Elizabeth [Colt], it is their determination to infuse their works with a sense of personal biography," an observation that applies equally to Frederick and Julia's Woodstock collection.

²⁰ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825–1875* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), 10. Novak's book is an indispensable source for the study of nineteenth century American views of art and nature.

²¹ The definitive text here is Novak, *Nature and Culture*, especially the Introduction: "The Nationalist Garden and the Holy Book."

²² E. L. Magoon, "Scenery and the Mind," in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: Or American Scenery, Art and Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), 7.

²³ Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 8.

²⁴ For an excellent essay on this theme see Joshua C. Taylor, "The Virtue of American Nature," in *America as Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

²⁵ Magoon, 3.

²⁶ A typical view is that expressed by William Gilpin, Territorial Governor of Colorado, in 1860: "To master the geographical portrait of our continent . . . is necessary to every American citizen . . . as necessary as it is to understand the radical principles of the American government over it and of political society. . . . The American Republic is predestined to expand and fit itself to the continent" (Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Painted Sketch; American Impressions from Nature, 1830–1880*, Exhibition Catalogue, Dallas Museum of Art [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998], 20).

²⁷ [Samuel R. Wells], *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette* (New York: 1872), quoted in David Scobey, "Anatomy of the Promenade: the Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-century New York," *Social History* 17:2 (May, 1992), 214.

²⁸ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 20.

²⁹ Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1994), 17.

³⁰ For a classic neo-Marxist account of landscape aesthetics in identity formation see Angela Miller, "Landscape Taste as an Indicator of Class Identity in Antebellum America," in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, ed., *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790–1850* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 340–361. Miller is accurate in stressing the role of landscape in the formation of northeastern cultural nationalism. The South never associated itself with "nature" to the same extent as the North, which employed the idea of "nature" to its advantage in the cultural wars preceding the beginning of actual hostilities.

³¹ Angela Miller, "Landscape Taste," 347.

³² See William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 379–408.

³³ Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist; Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), 147.

³⁴ Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting, IV," *The Crayon* 1 (14 February, 1855), 98.

³⁵ George M. Beard, *American Nervousness. Its Causes and Consequences* (1881), quoted in F. G. Gosling, *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987), 12.

³⁶ Gosling, 15.

³⁷ George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1874), 328. This is the same passage in which Marsh expresses the opinion that "it requires a very generous spirit in a landholder to plant a wood on a farm he expects to sell. . . . But the very fact of having begun a plantation would attach the proprietor more strongly to the soil for which he had made such a sacrifice."

³⁸ See Dona Brown, 130–135 for the creation of "Old Home Week" by the state legislatures of Vermont and New Hampshire in order to encourage immigrants to return to their place of birth, if only for a vacation. Both states underwent drastic depopulation in the decades before and after the Civil War.

³⁹ Dona Brown, 153.

⁴⁰ George Perkins Marsh, *Address Delivered Before the Agricultural Society of Rutland County, September 30, 1847*, quoted in Mark Madison, *Landscapes of Stewardship: The History of the Marsh-Billings Site* (Draft: January 28, 1998).

⁴¹ The Barbizon School of painting flourished during the 1830s to the 1850s and was centered in the rural village of Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau near Paris. The popularity of this school of landscape and animal painters has been associated with the population flight at the time from the country to the city, the rise of rural nostalgia, and the social insecurities aroused by the Revolution of 1848. The American response to the movement was essentially nostalgic and was most conspicuous among the elite of Boston and New York.

⁴² For an exhaustive study of the New York gallery system see Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth Century Paris Salons* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 276–288.

⁴³ The most thorough analysis of this complex question is found in Laura L. Meixner, *French Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865–1900* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ For the best account of the consolations offered by Barbizon images see Robert L. Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited* (Boston: Museum of Fine Art, 1962), 64–68. For American painters at Barbizon see Peter Birmingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975).

⁴⁵ In Chapter 3 of *Man and Nature*, Marsh frequently refers to Barbizon and the Forest of Fontainebleau as a "stable commonwealth," possessing an enlightened ratio of woodlot to plowland. His preference for the cultivated over the wild, a sensibility shared,

for example, by Frederick Law Olmsted, is stated at the outset of *Man and Nature*, 2–3: “Only for the sense of landscape beauty did unaided nature make provision. Indeed, the very commonness of this source of refined enjoyment seems to have deprived it of half its value.”

⁴⁶ The mid-century French critics Edmond and Jules de Goncourt articulated a somewhat less reassuring account of Barbizon painting: “It is when nature is condemned to death . . . that the human spirit hastens towards nature. From this sincere communion has come our masterpieces, the canvases of Troyon, Dupré, Rousseau, Francais, Diaz” (Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* [Newark, Univ. of Delaware Press, 1987], 73).

⁴⁷ Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983) for an analysis of this condition.

⁴⁸ Meixner, 259.

⁴⁹ For Denencourt’s invention of “picturesque-promenades” in the Forest of Fontainebleau see the brilliant and moving work of Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 553–560. Schama somewhat overenthusiastically defines Denencourt as “The Man Who Invented Hiking,” by which he means the man who invented the signed trail, the pre-defined itinerary of the romantic *promeneur*. Leaving aside the medieval cult of pilgrimage (a pilgrim is half a tourist and a tourist is half a pilgrim), the title of first obsessive “hiker” probably belongs as much to Alden Partridge of Norwich, Vermont as to any European, including Rousseau. As early as 1811, according to Laura and Guy Waterman, Partridge hiked 76 miles in a single day from Norwich to Crawford’s in the White Mountains for purposes of health and recreation. Laura and Guy Waterman, *Forest and Crag: A History of Hiking, Trail Blazing and Adventure in the Northeast Mountains* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 1989), 30–31.

⁵⁰ For a stunningly brilliant account of the evolution of the idea of the American National Park from the arboreal fantasies of Renaissance Germany via the Forest of Fontainebleau see Schama, Chapters 2, 3 and 9.

⁵¹ See Roger B. Stein, *Seascape and the American Imagination* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1975) for an account of the role of marine painting in American culture.

⁵² See the catalogue entry on Henry S. Chase’s *Dutch Pinkie Coming to Anchor* for a partial insight into Frederick Billings’ interest in marine painting.

⁵³ The relevant studies here are Lorenz Eitner, “The Open Window and the Storm-tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism,” *Art Bulletin* 37 (December, 1957), 279–290, and George P. Landow, “Shipwrecked and Castaway on the Journey of Life: An Essay Towards a Modern Iconography,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 46 (October–December 1972), 569–596.

⁵⁴ Magoon, 8.

⁵⁵ Genre painting is best described as the representation of everyday life “usually restricted to those made for their own sake rather than for religious, moral, or symbolic purpose.” James Smith Pierce, *From Abacus to Zeus: A Handbook of Art History* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), 25. Victorian genre painting, however, is an exception, since its purpose is almost always moralistic.

⁵⁶ Arnold Lewis, James Turner and Steven McQuillin, *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 26. This publication, a reprint with commentary of the encyclopedic *Artistic Houses: Being a Series of Interior Views of a number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States with A Description of the Art Treasures contained therein*, 2 Vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883–1884), is an indispensable study of the collecting habits of the Victorians.

⁵⁷ Lewis, Turner and McQuillin, 26.

⁵⁸ Lewis, Turner and McQuillin.

⁵⁹ “Orientalist” painting is defined as the representation of “subjects from the Near and Middle East, that is, from North Africa, Asia Minor and occasionally the Turkish-dominated parts of the Balkan Peninsula, all Islamic territories.” Gerald M. Ackerman, *American Orientalists* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1994), 6.

⁶⁰ The *locus classicus* of the “Orientalist” argument is Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979). In this ground breaking study, Said claims that all literary and pictorial treatments of non-Western subjects are either racist or imperialist, or both. Ackerman, 8–9, challenges Said’s contention, claiming that the motives of Orientalist painters were so diverse as to render a blanket condemnation false and meaningless.

⁶¹ See Fink, 196–213, for the meaning of folklife as a stage of Darwinian social evolution.

⁶² Fink, 212.

⁶³ Ackerman, 8–12, discusses meaningfully the distinctions between European and American Orientalists, drawing attention to the American preference for landscape over genre.

⁶⁴ Apart from the Peter Moran's *On the Trail in Idaho* in the Woodstock collection, Frederick also owned a George Catlin painting presumably representing Indians. His view of it was expressed quite explicitly in a diary entry: "The dreadful Catlin picture, glad to get rid of it—gave it to Annie."

⁶⁵ Frederick's diary entry for Tuesday, March 30 reads:

[In New York City] Bright cool day. Julia went out first time since coming down. At N. P. [Northern Pacific Railroad office] till 5:45 except called on Gen. Terry at Sturtevant not in—& to tailor & ordered some clothes. Metropolitan Museum of Art opened. Pres. Hazen here. Long discussion of Grey of Sup. Ct. [Supreme Court] decision yesterday on Railroad lines—are affecting proposed telegraph contract & Oregon Co. contract. Livingston called & Villard—appointed meeting tomorrow 3—Another report in papers from Barney that Sect. Ind. Con. would not exempt N. P. from forfeiture—false. In evening Ehrick Rossiter & wife called—& H. H. Sawyer.

Julia's diary for the same date reads:

"Laura & I were out in a coupé & chose 2 dresses for her at Hearn's—Lucy called—Laura went to see the dentist. Henry Sawyer, Ehrick & Mary Rossiter called after dinner."

⁶⁶ Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), 23–24.



Thomas Prichard Rossiter, *Venice* (1855), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Part I: Description and Evaluation of the Art Collection

The New York Collection

Any full assessment of this collection is compromised by its dispersal during the 1920s. While it has been possible to trace the subsequent provenance of at least eight of the more than eighty paintings in the 1891 inventory of the Madison Avenue house, it is difficult to evaluate the listed works on any basis other than appraised value. Fortunately, one of the three most highly assessed works of art from New York, Meyer von Bremen's *The Pious Mother* (\$5,000) has been located in a private collection. A painting of only modest aesthetic or economic value by today's critical standards, *The Pious Mother* was, during the Victorian era, a work held in the highest esteem.⁶⁷ According to a recent study of the art collections inventoried in the nineteenth century publication *Artistic Houses*, the most popular painters of the Gilded Age in order of importance were Diaz, Bouguereau, Détaillé, Corot, Meissonier, Schreyer, Merle, Vibert, Fortuny, Madrazo and Meyer von Bremen.⁶⁸ Of these eleven artists, five (Diaz, Bouguereau, Corot, Vibert and Meyer von Bremen) were represented in the Billingses' New York collection. Another Billings painting held today in a private collection, George Henry Boughton's *Return of the Mayflower*, was assessed at \$3,000, and would do well to bring that figure in today's art market. At the time of the painting's acquisition, Boughton was ranked just beneath the above listed pantheon of artistic luminaries, though today he represents little more than a footnote in art history. In their analysis of the paintings in the "domestic museum" as documented by *Artistic Houses*, Lewis, Turner and McQuillin have determined that roughly fifty to sixty percent

of the paintings in these famous collections were genre scenes, thirty percent landscapes (of which about twenty percent were American), ten percent Orientalist paintings, with the remainder historical and literary scenes.⁶⁹ Also during the 1870s and 1880s still-lives had ceased to be popular and portraits were largely of family members, while the vogue for acquiring "Old Masters" did not occur with regularity until the 1890s when the Billingses were no longer active in the art market.⁷⁰

According to the 1891 inventory the Billingses' New York collection, while conforming to the canon of preferred artists, was weighted more heavily towards landscape than either genre or Orientalist paintings. Of the thirty oil paintings located in the Parlor, for example, fourteen were landscapes (of which five were American including Church's *Evening in the Tropics*), eleven were genre and five were "Orientalist." While the extant Orientalist paintings in Woodstock are of a chastened picturesque landscape variety, the existence of Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Turkish Interior* and Frederick Arthur Bridgman's (a specialist in sensuous "Odalisques") *Turkish Girl of Constantinople* in the Parlor may have been larger, figural compositions.

The Sitting Room, Smoking Room and Hall, the other privileged sites in the house for the display of art, exhibited roughly the same proportion of landscapes to genre and "Orientalism."⁷¹ What can be inferred from the inventory of the New York collection is that Frederick's and Julia's taste largely conformed with that of their social and economic peers. Despite a general preference for landscape over genre and "Orientalism," they collected the fashionable artists of the

moment. In short, there is no reason to believe that the Billingses' New York collection was anything but conventional. Driven by the market skills of New York's newly emergent art dealers, the collection featured those artists most heavily promoted by them. In other instances, however, the Billingses reverted to the older practice of dealing directly with artists.

One episode—indeed, the most direct extant evidence—that casts considerable light upon Frederick Billings' aesthetic sensibility is contained in an exchange of letters with the painter Frederic Edwin Church. In negotiating the commission for *Evening in the Tropics*, the painter set forth the conditions of purchase according to the size of canvas: "Before commencing your picture I would like to have all the details fairly understood between us. . . . A 3 foot canvas makes a capital size, and I should expect to do myself justice on such a one. At the same time a large canvas gives greater scope, allows of a richer composition and more striking effects." Church listed his prices at \$1,000 for a length of two feet, \$2,000 for three feet, and \$3,000 for four feet. In conclusion he noted: "It will give me pleasure to take off 25 per ct from the regular price."⁷² In a letter of response written one week later Frederick advised: "I have heard from Mrs. Billings and I think our house will stand a picture of 4 feet—only don't make the frame very big. So the order is for a four feet picture. The more I can have of you the better."⁷³ When the painting was delivered in February of 1881, Frederick noted in his diary: "Julia saw Church picture—& advised him [Church] I thought too much left for imagination." Historians have noted that Church was loosening his style at this moment, possibly in response to criticism of the detailed particularism of his earlier work.⁷⁴ As one critic noted of *Evening in the Tropics* (which the artist borrowed from Billings in January of 1882 to display in his New York studio):

Church has just finished another of his famous South American scenes. . . . He paints the palmetto and the fern with as much pains as Pallaijuolo of old outlined the threads of gold filigree. . . . But is Mr. Church abandoning these methods for broader ones? There is evidence of it certainly, in this, his latest work. It may be an indifference which is merely temporary. . . . We think the grandeur and magnificence of the scene has lost little or nothing.⁷⁵

Apparently Frederick Billings, no longer in sympathy with evolving stylistic transformations, exhibited a preference for older American aesthetic traditions, which stressed the primacy of subject matter and a corresponding distrust of artistic manipulation. The "painterly" aesthetic license that he seemingly accorded to French Barbizon painters, he was unwilling to concede to the last great painter of the Hudson River School. This may also explain why he never acquired a landscape by George Inness, the most popular Barbizon-inspired American painter of the era. In addition, Billings surely would have rejected Inness' radical claim that "a work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not edify, but to awaken an emotion."⁷⁶ Still less would there have been any sympathy with Europe's emergent "Aesthetic Movement," and the conviction (as expressed by Whistler) that art was not "the handmaiden of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact or pioneer of morality."⁷⁷

Nowhere in the discourse about the purchase of *Evening in the Tropics* is there any mention of subject matter, giving rise to suspicion of the claim that the painting held biographical meaning for Frederick Billings.⁷⁸ As far as the evidence permits, considerations of décor and scale took precedence over theme. The fact that Church, six years later, completed a large

painting of nearly identical dimensions entitled *Morning in the Tropics* (National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C.) suggests that tropics rather than tragedies, contrasts rather than catastrophes, were the artist's principal concern. The personal meanings that Frederick might have imposed upon the work remain unknown.

Any final assessment of the Billingses' New York collection must acknowledge the fact that neither the Madison Avenue home nor its contents were included in the magisterial compendia compiled and published by Edward Strahan, under the "nom-de-plume" Earl Shinn, during the 1880s. Neither the opulent publication *Artistic Houses*, nor Shinn's exhaustive catalogue of art collections entitled *The Art Treasures of America: Being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America* (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, c. 1880) included the Billingses' house.⁷⁹ These inventories do, however, permit us to position the Billingses' holdings squarely within the parameters of Victorian collecting. In the words of a recent student of this seminal text: "Shinn's study is a monument to the astonishing uniformity of American taste in the era after the Civil War, particularly to the devotion to French Academic and Barbizon painting."⁸⁰

One suggestive reference to Frederick Billings' interest in art—probably his closest brush with New York's cultural elite—is found in George William Sheldon's book *Recent Ideals of American Art*, published in 1888. In this text the author lists Frederick, together with such luminaries as W. T. Walters, Charles A. Dana, Cornelius H. Vanderbilt, Henry G. Marquand, H. O. Havermayer and John Taylor Johnston, as a subscriber to the American Art Association prizes for 1884. According to this account, Frederick donated a considerable sum of money for the purchase of American art as a means of supporting the national culture against the increasing hegemony of foreign,

especially French, art.⁸¹ The passage by Congress in 1883 of a thirty percent duty on imported works of art—the "only country in the civilized world" to undertake this action—presumably was intended to support American artists against foreigners, as yet another means of asserting the slogan "Buy American." In 1884 the patriotic press editorialized against the "demoralization of art," and the tendency to "adore whatever is foreign." Decrying the "stupidly unpatriotic . . . purchases . . . made in an ignorant and contemptible spirit" by American millionaires "eager to buy foreign trash because it is foreign," the press described, by way of the most egregious example, the gallery of William H. Vanderbilt as a "shoddy, show-shop of unlimited wealth."⁸² Like many of their peers, Frederick's and Julia's efforts on behalf of American artists could not always be reconciled with their personal collecting habits, especially when it came to decorating the New York home. Fashion and respectability competed with cultural chauvinism in providing the motive force for the urban collection. Woodstock, in contrast, came to serve as the site of the Billingses' cultural nationalism.

The Woodstock Collection

The existence of an 1891 inventory of the paintings and engravings in the Woodstock mansion indicates that the current location of works of art departs significantly from their display over a century ago. The look and "feel" of the ensemble, however, preserves to a considerable degree the "aura" of the high Victorian ambiance. Based upon surviving photographic evidence, the Rockefellers' decorator reinstalled artworks during the 1950s in broad conformity with the original dispositions. Multi-tiered groupings of paintings in the parlor, library and hallway, for example, correspond with their known or suspected locations, while the Reception

Room, Dining Room and second story Hall have been completely re-hung. That stated, almost totally absent are the myriad of engravings that once consorted in promiscuous array with oil paintings upon the mansion's walls. Consigned to storage in the attic at some time during the twentieth century, graphic images no longer discourse with the meanings ascribed to the oil paintings. As such, it is difficult to discern fully how the collection worked during the lifetimes of Frederick and Julia. An attempt will be made, however, to reconstitute the collection on paper, restoring some of the original iconographic context to the whole.

If credence can be placed in the verbal exhortations of Lyman Beecher's daughters Catherine and Harriet (a copy of whose influential book *The American Woman's Home* [1869] was formerly in the Mansion library), engravings, copiously displayed throughout the home, were thought to be especially efficacious in the education of children:

Besides the chromos, which when well selected and of the best class, give the charm of color which belongs to expensive paintings, there are engravings which finely reproduce much of the real spirit and beauty of the celebrated pictures of the world. The educating influence of these works of art can hardly be overestimated. Surrounded by such suggestions of the beautiful, and such reminders of history and art, children are constantly trained to correctness of taste and refinement of thought, and stimulated—sometimes to efforts of artistic imitation, always to the eager and intelligent inquiry about the scenes, the places, the incidents represented.⁸³

The presence of numerous graphic images in almost every room and hallway of the Woodstock mansion, as over and against their near total absence (according to the

1891 inventory) from the New York home, intimates something of the divergent roles art was intended to play in the respective residences.

The difficulty of accurate historical reconstruction can be appreciated by the knowledge that the only American high Victorian collection in existence that has not been substantially altered over time is the art gallery of Vermont's St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, Horace Fairbank's remarkable monument to civic paternalism. Frederic Edwin Church's *Olana*, a New York State Historic Site, comes close, but the majority of the artworks there are by Church himself and the whole functions more as an artist's collection than a representative private collection of the era.⁸⁴ Jay Gould's *Lyndhurst* (Tarrytown, New York) and the E. B. Crocker Art Museum (Sacramento, California) preserve the look of period galleries, but both have been significantly transformed in terms of collections, display and furnishings. The Arnot Museum (Elmira, New York), George Washington Vanderbilt's *Biltmore* (Asheville, North Carolina), Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court (Boston, Massachusetts) and the Henry Clay Frick Gallery (New York) are substantially intact house museums with impressive "Old Master" collections, but all belong to the aesthetic ethos of the turn of the century rather than the high Victorian era.⁸⁵

Positioned within its current material context, and despite the fact that it no longer appears in its exact nineteenth century configuration, the Woodstock collection represents a remarkably intact repository of Victorian visual culture. Both the objects in the collection and the manner in which they are displayed resonate with the evidence afforded by such compendia of Victorianism as the publication *Artistic Houses*. For all of the alterations to which the Woodstock mansion has been subjected over time, the building, its furnishings and artworks retain the "aura" of a high Victorian residence. It

is important to reiterate that nowhere else can a private collection of artworks of this character and quality be experienced in such a authentic material context. The Rockefeller additions to the Billingses' legacy honor, in large measure, the spirit of the Gilded Age without resort to pedantry or archaeology.

As with the great urban art collections of the period, the Victorians exhibited an insatiable curiosity about the homes and possessions of the rural gentry. The Woodstock Mansion, however, was not listed in the lavishly documented 1886 publication, *Artistic Country-Seats: Types of Recent American Villa and Cottage Architecture*.⁸⁶ While there might be disagreement about how far one should live from New York City, there was little dispute about doing so. As bluntly stated by N. Parker Willis in *The Home Book of the Picturesque*: "Industry, necessity or vice, could alone prefer a house in a 'block,' among disturbances and gutters, to a home unencroached upon amid fresh air and gardens. Taste, study and luxury . . . are about removing to the country."⁸⁷

It is a common truth of Victorian studies that the "Home" was one of the period's most charged symbols, "a web of ideas, objects and images that was powerful partly because it seemed so basic, even mundane."⁸⁸ The twin towers of Victorian domesticity, "Culture" and "Comfort," were accommodated within the "Heavenly Home," which served as a bulwark, among other things, against "national and social disasters, moral and financial evils."⁸⁹ According to Katherine Grier, the Hallway and the Parlor were the most important spaces in the Victorian household and the domestic goal was to create "a comfortable theater for middle class self-presentation."⁹⁰ This was achieved at Woodstock by "theatricalizing" the Hallway as a pictorial prologue to the "social geography" of the Parlor. In the discourse between these domestic galleries was installed the Billingses' "shrine to American

nature."⁹¹

The Woodstock mansion, as over and against New York, contained a much larger ratio of landscapes to genre and Orientalist paintings. The Parlor, for example, exhibited sixteen landscapes, seven genre and six Orientalist works. Among the landscapes, all but possibly one⁹² were by American artists, including Bierstadt, Gifford, Cole and Kensett. By way of comparison, landscapes comprised only half of the paintings displayed in the Parlor of the New York house and of this number only a third were by American artists. Moreover, in New York the presence (in terms of both scale and value) of fashionable French Academic and Barbizon painters far overshadowed the Americans. Only Frederic Edwin Church's *Evening in the Tropics* (valued at \$3,000 as against the \$5,000 valuation accorded to Gérôme, Meyer von Bremen, and Bouguereau and \$4,000 for the Düsseldorf master, Aschenbach) could be said to rival in scale, value and critical esteem the work of the European painters. A similar pattern emerges when the Hallways at New York and Woodstock—always important sites for the display of artworks—are compared. In New York the ratio of landscapes to genre and Orientalist paintings was ten to seven to three. At Woodstock there were six landscapes, one genre painting and no Orientalist works. In New York all of the paintings in the Hallway were European or Near Eastern views with the exception of a canvas by Alexander Wyant entitled *Adirondack Scenery* (presently unlocated); at Woodstock, the Hallway contained such canonic American scenes as *Mount Hood* by William Keith, *Sunset in the Yosemite* by William Bradford and *Niagara* by Thomas Cole. As the first paintings encountered, the large publicly-scaled canvases of the American West, together with the smaller view of Niagara Falls, enjoyed pride of place, and functioned as an introduction to the wider collection. According to publicist

Samuel Bowles, an author much respected by Billings, Yosemite Valley and Mount Hood represented the Alpha and the Omega of western landscape scenery. "It is hard indeed to imagine a more magnificent snow mountain," Bowles ejaculated. "Mount Hood offers more of natural beauty and wonder to interest and excite the traveler than any other single journey or scene which the Pacific Coast presents, except the Yosemite Valley. That must, of course, stand first, unrivaled and unapproachable. But to this [Mount Hood] I give the second place."⁹³

In his study of nineteenth century material culture Kenneth Ames has argued that the front Hall in Victorian mansions was a site of "first impressions" (and often the cause of lasting impressions), encoding the meanings to be ascribed to the household as a whole.⁹⁴ As such the impact of this exceptional American landscape gallery upon a visitor to Woodstock would have been as dramatically staged and inscriptive of intended meaning at the time as it is today. Projecting large scale canvases of an American waterfall (Niagara), a Valley (Yosemite) and a mountain (Mount Hood), the Hallway expressed the idea of Creation and its natural agents. Whether formed by gradual erosion or catastrophic uplift, the land could be assimilated to the divine through art and its impact on the human imagination.

From this sampling, it is possible to conclude that the New York collection was, as already noted, largely conventional in terms of the collecting practices of New Yorkers, while the Woodstock collection was informed by an emphatic American inflection. This partially accords with the practices of other New England rural collectors like Robbins Battell of Norfolk, Connecticut, whose picture gallery contained "a veritable atlas of northeastern scenery, from Lake George and the Catskills to the White Mountains," to Horace Fairbanks of St. Johnsbury, Vermont who

built his collection around Albert Bierstadt's gigantic *Domes of the Yosemite*.⁹⁵ In short, for Victorians there was a marked difference between the city and the country. Even the transfer of a handful of Barbizon landscapes from New York to Woodstock by the Rockefellers did not substantially alter the equation in the American-European pictorial dialogue.

At this juncture, it is important to reiterate that the New York art world was strongly divided, during the Billingses' careers as collectors during the late 1870s and 1880s, over the issue of patronage of European versus American works.⁹⁶ As art critic George W. Sheldon sarcastically explained, New York patrons were "generally supposed to subscribe to the creed the first and front article of which is 'I believe in the transcendent excellence of Parisian Art.'"⁹⁷ "Such sentiments," states Linda Skalet, "left the American artist with few customers for his work. The very rich were looking for . . . the most popular European artists, and the not so rich . . . preferred a second or third rate or even a forged Corot, Meissonier, Schreyer, Fortuny, Daubigny or Dupré to the work of the best American artists of the day."⁹⁸ Alongside a handful of like-minded patrons (Thomas B. Clarke, Henry T. Chapman, Samuel T. Shaw) Frederick and Julia bucked the tide of urban fashion, locating, however, the majority of their American paintings in Woodstock.

The present grouping of marine paintings in the Reception Room (also known as the Prayer Room) does not reflect the original disposition of artworks at the time of Frederick and Julia.⁹⁹ In lieu of the current maritime gallery, the room was hung exclusively with engravings, all presently exiled to storage. According to the 1891 inventory, the thematic arrangement was paired or contrasted graphic images. Often unintended by the artists, but united by collectors, these "contrasts" were central to the Victorian habits of mind. Prominent in

the Reception Room, for example, were identically framed engravings of two well-known nineteenth century French paintings: *Michelangelo in His Studio* and *Raphael in His Studio*.¹⁰⁰ For the Victorians, images of the two supreme masters of the Renaissance symbolized the dichotomy between Romanticism and Classicism, imagination and intellect, and, curiously enough for Americans, Protestantism and Catholicism.¹⁰¹ The historic figures of Michelangelo and Raphael were capable of denoting almost any dualism lodged in the Victorian imagination and, like all dyadic formulations (North/South, Man/Woman, Nature/Culture etc.) privileged the first over the second term. A second “contrast,” again unintended by the artists, was provided by engraved copies of two of the most celebrated American landscapes of the nineteenth century: Albert Bierstadt’s *The Rocky Mountains: Landers’ Peak* (1863, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Frederic Edwin Church’s *The Heart of the Andes* (1859, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Similar in size (c. 20” x 30”) and almost identically framed, the two prints were surely intended to reconvene the celebrated pairing of the two epically scaled six by ten foot canvases that were exhibited face to face at the 1864 New York Metropolitan Fair for the United States Sanitary Commission (a Civil War forerunner of the Red Cross). The fact that Julia was a member of the Executive Committee for the Commission underscores the significance of these images to the Billingses.¹⁰² For American critics of the time, as well as for most citizens, the juxtaposed views of South America and the American West delineated the two major axes of national experience, North/South and East/West. Ideas ranging from sectional rivalries to the Monroe Doctrine to Manifest Destiny were continuously associated with these views of an unspoiled New World Eden.

Similar observations can be made with

respect to the current disposition of objects in the Dining Room. In lieu of the Rockefeller display of ornamental china, the Billingses, according to the inventory, had installed a number of large steel engravings after paintings by the celebrated English artist Sir Edwin Landseer. One of the most popular and representative figures of the Victorian era, Landseer (the Walter Scott of painting) specialized in animal pictures and views of the Scottish Highlands. In addition he was a favorite of John Ruskin, who praised Landseer’s *The Old Shepherd’s Chief Mourner* (1837, London, Victoria and Albert Museum) as “one of the most perfect poems or pictures . . . which modern times have seen.”¹⁰³ The presence of an engraved copy of a self-portrait of the artist with his signature dogs (*The Connoisseurs*), together with an engraving of the French “animaliste” Rosa Bonheur (engagingly entitled *Rosa Bonheur with a Steer* after a painting by the Frenchman Edouard Dubufe), indicates that the Dining Room was designated as a pictorial sanctuary for animal art and artists. These identically framed images, deployed as pendants by the Billingses, pay homage to the best-known and most beloved animal painters of the nineteenth century. Male and female, English and French, the two artists were inextricably linked in the imagination of period as the creators of the most familiar household icons.

As well as the portraits of animal artists, another famous pairing, this time solely of animal protagonists, was displayed in the Dining Room. Elegantly framed in identical settings, Sir Edwin Landseer’s much admired portraits of cattle and deer, anthropomorphically rendered as nuclear families, hung as opposed visions of the domestic and the wild. While the image of Highland cattle might best be understood in relation to the presence of the Scotsman George Aitken as farm manager, the engravings of deer are less comprehensible since Frederick had little known interest in hunting.¹⁰⁴ Once again the

Victorian delight in contrasts (domestic versus wild) doubtless played a role in the selection of images for the Dining Room, though the nutritional references (as well as the near total eclipse of Landseer's and Rosa Bonheur's reputations) have made the engravings less palatable to modern sensibilities.¹⁰⁵

A recent and remarkable study of Victorian material culture by Kenneth L. Ames, entitled *Death in the Dining Room*, interrogates "the iconography of dining" as embodied in furnishings and artworks of the period.¹⁰⁶ Noting that the Victorians were careful to provide each room of a house with a discrete function whose purpose was both "enabled and articulated by the furnishings," Ames argues that the "predatory impulse" was the dominant theme of period Dining Rooms.¹⁰⁷ Images of game, the hunt, and, to a far lesser extent, domestic animals abounded on sideboards and in graphic images on the walls. "However else these [artifacts] may be interpreted," Ames concludes,

the continuing rape of the landscape, the unthinking slaughter of creatures and extermination of species, and the short sighted consumption of nonrenewable resources, in short, the consistent elevation of economic and stereotypical masculine values above all others were all grounded in a predatory mentality. Second, this predatory mentality was incorporated into a social structure and a culture that allowed powerful people to prey, not only on the animal world, but on members of their own species. Men were still hunters, but their predatory activity took place within the allegedly civilized world of business, industry and national expansion.¹⁰⁸

While these allegations may be overstated with regard to Frederick Billings (the sideboard is ornamental rather than

figurative), they do serve to contextualize the animal imagery of the Dining Room within the broader ethos of the historical period. Eschewing the masculine iconography of the hunt (still lifes of dead game) featured in many Dining Rooms of the period, the Billingses preferred the more benign and sentimental imagery of humanized, family oriented, animal life.

Whatever the reason for the removal of the majority of the Landseer and Bonheur prints to the attic during the twentieth century, the substitution of the ornamental décor of china for images of herbivorous ungulates denotes a dramatic shift of sensibility. Hunting scenes engraved after Landseer paintings were also displayed in the Music Room and the California Room, providing further evidence of the popularity of the English painter, who, for better and worse, was the most frequently represented artist in the Woodstock collection.

Comparison of the New York and Woodstock Collections

The major conclusion to be drawn from a comparison of the New York and Woodstock collections is the relative conventionality of both, the major differences being of degree rather than kind. The city collection was numerically, and no doubt aesthetically, dominated by European artists while Woodstock possessed a more clearly defined American inflection. Of the thirty-two paintings in the Madison Avenue Parlor, for example, only nine were by Americans, and of these, Sophie Gengembre Anderson, Frank Waller and Frederick Arthur Bridgman were expatriate artists living mostly abroad and working in the academic Salon manner. At Woodstock the Hall and Parlor were given over largely to American landscapes, Frederick's and Julia's personal "shrine to American nature."

The Billingses' major activity as collectors fell between 1870, when they first began

visiting New York galleries and artists' studios, and about 1891, the date of the last entry in Julia's diary concerning the acquisition of art. As recent studies have demonstrated, the year 1866 was the high water mark for the national school in the art market. Prices paid for Hudson River School paintings, as manifestations of patriotism for the redeemed Union, reached their apogee and began an almost immediate decline.¹⁰⁹ An art critic, writing for *Putnam's Magazine* in 1869, noted: "Ten years back Mr. Durand's pictures were considered models of landscape art. . . . But younger artists, of the new school with which he had no sympathy, crowded him out of public favor. People grew tired of his everlasting moonlight scenes, his very green forests and meadows . . ." ¹¹⁰ A decade later the critic S. G. W. Benjamin delivered the *coup de grace*:

If there has been a fault in this school of American landscape art, it has been, perhaps, in endeavoring to get too much in a picture, in trying to be too literal; so that the great attention given to the details had excited wonder rather than stimulated the imagination, and had marred the impression of general effect which should be the chief idea in a work of art.¹¹¹

Recalling Billings' reaction of 1881 to Church's *Evening in the Tropics*, "I thought too much left for imagination," it is likely that Frederick was not in the vanguard of changing aesthetic attitudes. Rather, in art he seemed to prefer the older traditions of American realism, as expressed by such like-minded cultural figures as John Ruskin and Asher Durand who advocated letting "nature paint the better part of the picture."¹¹²

The Billingses' careers as collectors spanned the great historical and cultural shift in sensibility that occurred during the decade of the 1870s. The modern art historian Patricia Hills has described this sea change

in the art world as a move

from a moralizing, socially concerned ethos of the 1860s to the abstract and materialist amorality that characterized the pursuit of success and dominated the body politic in the late 1870s. Thus, the critically praised and popularly admired anecdotal genre painting of the Civil War and early Reconstruction era . . . was replaced by art-for-art's-sake painting divorced from morality or didactic purpose. The new art, inspired by French painting, emphasized tonal values rather than moral values, loose, spontaneous, and impressionistic brushwork rather than meticulous attention to detail . . . and cosmopolitan holiday subject matter rather than American regional subjects. In short, the sophisticated tourist's detached curiosity . . . of exotic nomads in the Middle East replaced the moralist's ideal of social justice and community.¹¹³

If any meaningful generalization about the Billingses' collecting habits can be drawn from this definition, it is that the New York collection is best characterized by the latter half of Hills' equation, and Woodstock by the older values. In point of fact, no such strict formulation is entirely satisfactory as the Billingses' cultural practices fall on both sides of the cultural divide and at times were both capricious and idiosyncratic.

On the basis of existing evidence, however, it seems likely that the Woodstock collection, with its emphasis upon American landscapes, Landseer prints, humble genre, and a dusting of Orientalist fantasies, denoted personal and rural rather than metropolitan values. A world of make-believe, with only a few storm clouds on the horizon, the Woodstock collection spoke in order of importance to religion, family, the American land, rural life in France and the Scottish Highlands, the romance of Italy, life at sea, the mystery of the Middle East, and the piety and nobility of the poor. The work of artist-

relatives like Thomas Pritchard Rossiter and mementos of places visited and books read completed the picture gallery. A virtual “memory palace” of their life and aspiration, the Woodstock collection provided a model of one family’s world view.¹¹⁴ Rising above these assorted images was the overarching theme of homage to nature, a nature restored pictorially to prelapsarian innocence and often sited in the American West. Beyond the mansion walls lay the actual moral and cultural landscape of the estate, inspired by the ideals of stewardship articulated by George Perkins Marsh, and materially shaped by painted images of an imagined world of possibility.

One of the Billingses’ oldest and most cherished acquaintances was the Hartford clergyman Horace Bushnell. A frequent visitor to Woodstock, Bushnell and Frederick had been instrumental in founding the University of California at Berkeley, the name of the site having been chosen by Billings. Among the several books by Bushnell in the Mansion library is *Christian Nurture*, one of the most influential texts of the Victorian era.¹¹⁵ In his argument, one of the strongest articulations of the emergent cult of domesticity, Bushnell called for the home to “become the church of childhood, the table and hearth a holy rite, and life an element of saving power.”¹¹⁶ Drawing heavily upon the architectural theories of John Ruskin, Bushnell professed that good homes made good people, insisting as never before upon the home as a site of salvation.¹¹⁷ In the light of this domestic equation, reiterated by numerous writers of the era on the nexus between architecture and morality, it is tempting to interpret the Woodstock mansion, together with its furnishings and surroundings, as both literally and figuratively a “moral landscape.” In this connection the spaces of the home, especially the Hall and the Parlor, can be viewed as the vestibule and nave of a domestic church, while the landscape paintings—“the shrine to

American nature”—can be understood as visual synecdoches for stained glass windows. Moving beyond the *paradis artificiel* of the mansion into the pastoral gardens of the estate, the bucolic landscape of the farm and ultimately to the forest plantation—the world of existential agency—one encounters the *paysage moralisé*, the material realization of those painted vehicles of light in the Billingses’ world of art.

The Roles of Julia and Frederick Billings in the Formation of the Collections

In her insightful analysis of the cultural practices of Victorians, Dianne Sachko Macleod has produced an anatomy of art collecting into which the Billingses fit with few apparent deviations.¹¹⁸ Her findings are especially helpful in understanding the character and quality of the Billingses’ collections and the respective roles of Julia and Frederick in their formation. Rejecting the conventional belief that the Victorian middle-class was essentially “philistine” in its attitudes towards art, Macleod has sought to understand their collecting habits as a function of emergent middle class identity formation. The preference for modern landscapes and a corresponding avoidance of “Old Masters,” for example, reflects not only the mandates of John Ruskin, but a strategy for circumventing problems of “connoisseurship.” Acquiring the work of living artists not only protected the buyer from forgeries and misattributions, but enabled dealers to issue certificates of authenticity.¹¹⁹ Similarly, a penchant for pictorial realism over aestheticism and narrative over “art for art’s sake” is best understood as “another achievement of the progressive ideal.” “Finish as an aesthetic element,” writes Macleod, “signaled tangible evidence of painstaking labor, pride in the work ethic, and corroboration of money well spent.”¹²⁰

Along related lines, the subordinate role

of women to men in collecting during the Victorian period is explained by their economic status of having “little control over their personal incomes,” and therefore “women did not conduct the financial transactions recorded in artists’ or dealers’ account books.” “It is men,” Mcleod states, “who dominated the field,” a conclusion that broadly characterizes the practices of the Billingses.¹²¹

This is not to suggest, however, that Julia lacked artistic culture. Initially, at least, she was exposed to both the New York and European art worlds well before Frederick.¹²² Julia’s mother Anna Maria Parmly (née Valk Smith) was a friend of the eminent British art historian Anna Jameson whom they visited in London during a trip to Europe in 1854–1855. In her memoirs Julia, who was twenty at the time, referred to Mrs. Jameson as “blond and stout, a charming talker and a superior art critic.”¹²³ Mother and daughter spent the winter of 1854 in Paris in lodgings in the Place Vendôme in order to be near an older daughter, Anna Ehrick, who had married the American painter Thomas Pritchard Rossiter.¹²⁴ Dividing their time between social events, attendance at the opera and a visit to Versailles, the fountains of which Julia described as “somewhat like those of the Saint Louis fair,” Anna Maria arranged to have her daughters presented to the Empress Eugénie.¹²⁵ This occasion produced some consternation as Anna Ehrick did not have a suitable dress for the event. In her *Memoirs* Julia, playing the role of intercessor *cum* art critic, observed somewhat archly: “I begged it [a ballroom dress] for her. She could not have afforded it herself, as Rossiter, because of his aspirations for high art, was not earning much at portraiture in which he excelled.” Anticipating the artist’s future reputation, she opined, “He did nothing to give him lasting fame. He had talent but was not painstaking.”¹²⁶

That spring Julia and her mother took the Grand Tour visiting art museums in

Dresden, Florence, Venice, and London. Julia’s travel diary is full of conventional Victorian effusions about the works of art seen. At the famed Dresden Gallery

we saw such scores of fine pictures, that I must content myself with marking in the catalogue those that most impressed us. 3 works of Ang[elica] Kaufmann charmed us and the [illegible] painting of Ribera, Spanish artist, we thought grandly treated. Raphael’s *Madonna del Sixte* (Sistine Madonna) we returned to after seeing [illegible] rooms is I think a nobler conception than the *Mad[onna] della Seggiola* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti). Leaving at 2 1/2 we came home, rested, then went to the porcelain store . . . where we bought large and small busts of Schiller & Goethe—one of Beethoven.¹²⁷

At the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Julia gazed upon “Peter Rubens last work when he was 62 [sic] a wonderful work and so terribly natural it is painful to look at.” She remarked upon a Rembrandt, a Velazquez portrait of *Don Carlos* and Holbein’s *Mary Queen of Scots* (presumably the portrait of Jane Seymour) “which was dreadfully hard and stiff.”

In Florence they visited the Palazzo Pitti where Julia especially liked Guido Reni’s *Cleopatra* and, of necessity, Raphael’s *Madonna della Seggiola*, the experience of which “I wish particularly ever to remember.”¹²⁸ After two hours they drove to the Uffizi only to discover a phenomenon known to all visitors to Italy, the capriciously erratic hours of the famed museum. It had closed at noon and, much to Julia’s chagrin, she saw “none of the masterpieces.” Then it was on to Santa Croce where she admired the tombs of Dante, Canova, Alfieri, Galileo and Macchiavelli. This was followed by a trip to Santa Annunziata “where we saw the picture painted it is said by angels.”¹²⁹

Completing the circuit, they stopped off at the Cathedral where “Mother was much impressed with the simple grandeur of the Duomo.”

That evening or the next day they visited the studio of famed American sculptor Hiram Powers (a native of Woodstock, Vermont), a required stop on the Grand Tour.¹³⁰ There they saw many busts of “statesmen and women of more or less note,” and a personification of *America*, “a half-draped figure w[ith] one hand pointing upwards and uplifted face, a lovely figure but not expressive of half the grandeur of [Thomas] Crawford’s.”¹³¹ Next they visited the studio of largely forgotten American painter Thomas Buchanan Read (1822-1872) where they saw “exquisite oil paintings in miniature.”¹³²

After her marriage to Frederick Billings in March of 1862, Julia’s observations on art become increasingly conventional and abbreviated. Though there are frequent references in her diaries to the role of art in their lives, they seldom amount to more than a cursory judgment of whether a work is “pretty,” “pleasing,” or “disappointing.”¹³³ Occasionally there is a reference to price paid for a work of art, especially if it was thought to be *bon marché*.¹³⁴ Perhaps most characteristic of her attitude is a diary entry for May 28, 1886 where Julia writes, “[Frederick] at Lanthier’s where I fear he was tempted to buy another picture.”¹³⁵ Even more telling is the fact that after Frederick’s death in 1890 Julia made no significant art purchases, though she lived for another twenty-four years.¹³⁶ Despite Julia’s seeming indifference to art, she and Frederick often attended gallery openings, exhibitions, and auctions together. Frederick, however, clearly took the lead in purchase decisions, though frequently only after seeking Julia’s approval.¹³⁷ Even that most domestic of occupations, the hanging of pictures, seems to have been largely Frederick’s domain. Frequent entries from Julia’s diaries for June

and July 1886 indicate that Frederick “was very busy hanging pictures” at the refurbished Woodstock estate.¹³⁸

Frederick Billings’ diaries are not especially helpful in positioning himself and Julia within the New York art scene. Apart from the spirited exchange of letters with Frederic Church over the purchase of the Thomas Cole paintings and the commission for *Evening in the Tropics*, there is little to indicate that he or Julia were especially active in the New York art world. A letter from painter Albert Bierstadt inviting Frederick and Julia to visit his studio (Frederick declined due to a cold) suggests a more than casual relationship with that favored artist.¹³⁹ Otherwise a handful of letters concerning commissioned works of art, a notice from the sales agent of the National Academy of Design, and some diary entries dealing with bids for art auctions complete the picture of patrons whose interest in the acquisition of art seldom, if ever, rose above the norm for Victorian Americans.¹⁴⁰

In her instructive study of the practices of New York artists, dealers and collectors during the post-Civil War era, Annette Blaugrund has documented the complex system by which works of art were marketed and purchased.¹⁴¹ Among the numerous venues in which artists and patrons were brought together were artists’ studios (Tenth Street Studio Building), gentlemen’s clubs (The Century Association, Union League Club) and art organizations (American Art Association, National Academy of Design). In addition there was the process of direct commission from artists as well as purchase from art dealers, auction houses and art fairs. Frederick’s and Julia’s diaries indicate that they availed themselves of all of these means for acquiring artworks, practices which align them with most collectors of the time. Only a few well-heeled patrons such as William T. Walters of Baltimore or Isabella Stewart Gardner of Boston relied exclusively upon agents like Samuel P. Avery and Joseph

Duveen to assemble their collections. After Frederick's death in 1890, dealers and agents increasingly took over the market, as "art was becoming big business. The number of artists, the increase in production, and the elevation of prices made it profitable for third party intercourse."¹⁴²

Frederick's previously cited donation for the 1884 American Art Association prizes probably constitutes his closest brush with New York's cultural elite. His long term membership in New York's Century Association, "the most unspeakably respectable club in the United States," indicates that he had access to the community of arts and letters, but his name is never mentioned as one of the club's leaders.¹⁴³ Frederick was also a member of the prestigious Union League Club, the membership of which is credited with providing the impetus for the creation of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870. Frederick, however, is not listed as one of the prime movers.¹⁴⁴ Julia, on the other hand, is listed as a member of the Executive Committee for the 1864 New York Metropolitan Fair for the United States Sanitary Commission, one of the most important art exhibitions of the Civil War era. As her diary for this year is no longer extant, it is not known what role she played in this important cultural event. Finally there exists an invitation to an 1889 Autumn Reception at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but there is no evidence that Frederick or Julia were founders or prominent members of the organization that after 1870 was to become the epicenter of New York's art world.

Among the roughly two thousand American millionaires of the Gilded Age, Frederick and Julia, from today's perspective, seem clearly to have been in a position to assemble a significant art collection. This, however, is not what occurred. Alongside the famous New York collectors of the period—Robert L. Stuart, John Taylor

Johnson, R. M. Olyphant, Robert Hoe and Marshall O. Roberts—the Billingses were only modest players. Nor do their names figure among the clients of the most important New York dealers of the age: Samuel P. Avery, William Schaus, Charles M. Kurtz and Michael Knoedler. In all fairness to the Billingses, however, their tastes were no more or less conventional for the time than those of such luminaries as the Havermeyers, J. P. Morgan or William T. Walters, all of whom lived long enough to witness the shift in sensibility from European salon painting to the Impressionists. As Nathaniel Burt has astutely noted: "a whole generation of collectors [was] deluded into thinking that its taste represents an absolute and incontrovertible standard of what is best, most worthy and most important."¹⁴⁵ Like most of their economic peers, the Billingses depended upon art dealers, undertook direct commissions from artists and occasionally purchased works of art at auctions. Religion, the Northern Pacific Railroad, the refurbishing of the Marsh estate, the model farm and the Mount Tom plantation all took precedence over the visual arts which, at their most important, are best understood as pictorial glosses upon these more vital aspects of their lives.

Part I: Endnotes

⁶⁷ According to the *Art Price Index, International* for 1996–1997 (Madison, Ct.: Sound View Press, 1997), paintings by Meyer von Bremen bring between \$12,000 and \$44,000 at auction while Frederic Edwin Church's *Morning in the Tropics* (Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Ct.), valued at \$3,000 in the 1891 inventory, would sell for between \$700,000 and \$1,200,000. Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Turkish Interior* (\$5,000 in the 1891 inventory) would bring somewhere in the vicinity of \$1,500,000.

⁶⁸ Lewis, Turner and McQuillin, 24.

⁶⁹ The Billingses' 279 Madison Avenue home is not included though their neighbor Frederick F. Thompson, 283 Madison Avenue, is. Also included is the infamous home of Henry Villard at 451 Madison Avenue, where "despite the atmosphere of fresh mortar and new varnish" there were no pictures as yet hung. See William C. Shopsin et al., *The Villard Houses: Life Story of a Landmark* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 58, for an amusing account of Frederick Billings' visit to 451 Madison Avenue during the Northern Pacific crisis of 1883 to 1884.

⁷⁰ With the creation of metropolitan museums of art in New York and Boston in 1870, the desire for "Old Masters" began to increase and was fostered by dealers against the caveats of Ruskin for the likes of Gardner, Frick, Morgan, Havemeyer, Freer and Johnson. See Fink, 171 for an account of these emergent collectors.

⁷¹ The disposition of artworks was as follows: Sitting Room: four landscape, three genre, one Orientalist; Smoking Room: eight landscape, one genre; and the Hallway: ten landscapes, seven genre scenes and three Orientalist paintings.

⁷² Frederic Church to Frederick Billings (February 14, 1880), Billings Family Archives.

⁷³ Frederick Billings to Frederic Church (February 20, 1880), Archives Olana State Historic Site.

⁷⁴ Franklin Kelly, *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 67.

⁷⁵ "Art Notes," *New York Evening Mail and Express*, January 4, 1882, quoted in Elizabeth M. Kornhauser, *American Paintings Before 1945 in the Wadsworth Athenaeum* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), Vol. 1, 212–213.

⁷⁶ George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February, 1878), 458–459.

⁷⁷ James McNeill Whistler, *The Ten O'Clock Lecture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 10.

⁷⁸ Robin W. Winks, *Frederick Billings: A Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 152. In her entry for *Morning in the Tropics* Elizabeth M. Kornhauser, 210–213, repeats Wink's assertion that the painting was intended as a reminder of Frederick and Laura Billings' journey up the Chagres River in 1849. According to Kornhauser:

The figure of a young woman at left in Church's painting, shown holding a fishing line and encompassed by the ominous steamy yellow atmosphere, unquestionably symbolized Billings' sister Laura, thought to be the first woman to die in the gold rush. Church also included partially clad native boatmen, further documenting the memory Frederick Billings held of this tragic event.

⁷⁹ Though published after Frederick's death, the publication forerunner of the *Social Register* does not mention the Billings family. Lyman Horace Weeks, ed., *Prominent Families of New York: Being an Account in Biographical Form of Individuals and Families Distinguished as Representatives of the Social, Professional and Civic Life of New York City* (New York: The Historical Company, 1897). It is particularly interesting that the Billings' New York house was not featured in the book *Artistic Houses*, since the Philadelphia home of one of Frederick Billings' Woodstock neighbors and social contemporaries, Edward H. Williams (1824–1899), was included in that book. Williams was a native of one of Woodstock's founding families and made his fortune in the Baldwin Locomotive Works. The Japanesque library in his Main Line home was featured in the book.

⁸⁰ George William Sheldon, *Recent Ideals of American Art* (1888; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977), 4.

⁸¹ Sheldon, *Recent Ideals*, 34. According to Sheldon, the artworks purchased by the American Art Association were donated to the metropolitan museums of major American cities. For the complex relationships between the National Academy of Art (which refused to exhibit the work of American artists living abroad) and the Society of American Artists, founded in 1878 for the purpose of exhibiting expatriate art, see Fink, 271–289.

⁸² *Hartford, Connecticut Daily Times*, January, 4, 1884, quoted in Hosley, 182.

⁸³ Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home or Principles of Domestic Science: Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful and*

Christian Homes (1869; reprint, Hartford, Conn., Stowe-Day Foundation, 1975), 94.

⁸⁴ The recently assembled Jasper Cropsey Foundation in the artist's old studio/home at Yonkers is an attempt to reconstitute *de novo* an artist's collection.

⁸⁵ Matthias Hollenback Arnot collected only "Old Master" and contemporary European salon painters, but no Americans, a clear reflection of the revised turn of the century mentality. See Rachel Sandinsky, *A Collector's Vision* (Elmira, New York: Arnot Art Museum, 1989).

⁸⁶ George William Sheldon, ed., *Artistic Country-Seats: Types of Recent American Villa and Cottage Architecture* (1886; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1979).

⁸⁷ N. Parker Willis, "The Highland Terrace above West Point," in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: Or American Scenery, Art and Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), 105.

⁸⁸ Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors and Upholstery, 1850–1930* (Rochester, N. Y.: The Strong Museum, 1988), 3. This remarkable text is an indispensable study of Victorian domestic culture.

⁸⁹ Julia McNair Wright, *The Complete Home: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs* (1884), quoted in Grier, *Culture and Comfort*, 3.

⁹⁰ Grier, *Culture and Comfort*, 2.

⁹¹ According to an interior decorator writing in 1888, "the most popular view of the parlor is as a shrine into which is placed all that is most precious." Mary Gay Humphreys, "The Parlor," *The Decorator and Furnisher* (1888), quoted in Grier, *Culture and Comfort*, 83.

⁹² The painting entitled *Moonlight* by the elusive L. Donizetti may be a European work, but the artist's name appears in none of the research indices.

⁹³ Samuel Bowles, *Our New West. Records of Travel Between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford Publishing Co., 1869), 482.

⁹⁴ Kenneth L. Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia, Temple Univ. Press, 1992), 12–28.

⁹⁵ For Robbins Battell's collection see Hosley, 250, n. 62 and for Fairbanks see Patricia C. F. Mandel, "American Paintings at the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum in Vermont," *Antiques*, April 1980, 868–879.

⁹⁶ The most thorough study of the collecting habits of New Yorkers during the period is Linda Henefield Skalet, *The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870–1915* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins Univ., 1980; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International).

⁹⁷ George W. Sheldon, *American Painters* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 10.

⁹⁸ Skalet, 3.

⁹⁹ During the nineteenth century marine paintings were displayed randomly throughout the mansion in proximity to landscapes, genre paintings and Orientalist images. To the question of why so many marine paintings are found in inland, seacoastless Vermont, the answer is provided, once again, by the Reverend Magoon, 27: "nearest allied to the mountains in their natural effects is the influence of oceans on the national mind."

¹⁰⁰ The *Michelangelo* was engraved by Edmond Castan after the painting by Alexandre Cabanel, and the *Raphael* by Max Girardet after the painting by Charles Francois Jalabert. Both engravings are dated 1859.

¹⁰¹ The author of this bizarre conceit in which Michelangelo is converted into an "evangelical" was the influential American critic James Jackson Jarves, *Art Studies: The "Old Masters" of Italy: Painting* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1861), 432. By such means Protestant Americans could assimilate the work of Catholic Italians to the modern dispensation, much as Frederick Billings could tolerate the eminently Catholic Frenchman Alexandre Antigna's *Normandy Peasants at a Shrine* (c. 1860–1870) which was prominently displayed, then as now, in the Hallway of the Woodstock Mansion.

¹⁰² As Janet Houghton noted in the catalogue of the Woodstock collection, Julia Billings referred in her "lists" to the Smillie engraving after Bierstadt's painting as "Heart of the Rockies" rather than "Rocky Mountain Encampment," the title used in the engraving. At some level "Heart of the Rockies" and "Heart of the Andes" formed an ideological pairing in her mind. Janet R. Houghton, *Marsh-Billings Mansion Art Collection* (April, 1997, unpublished typescript).

¹⁰³ Richard Ormond, *Sir Edwin Landseer* (Philadelphia: Museum of Art, 1981), 38.

¹⁰⁴ Katherine Grier (*Culture and Comfort*, 12) argues that the iconography of the hunt, "even though few of the men who headed dinner tables in these settings ever brought dinner home to their families in such a manner," reflected a sense of the economic competence that "good masculine providers were

supposed to have." For a more polemical view see Kenneth L. Ames, "Murderous Propensities: Notes on Dining Iconography in the mid-Nineteenth Century," in Nancy H. Schless, *Three Centuries: Two Continents* (Watkins Glen, N. Y.: American Life Foundation, 1983).

¹⁰⁵ Happily these engravings have been conserved and rehung in one of the third story bedrooms where they serve as reminders of the enormous psychological gulf between Victorians and Moderns.

¹⁰⁶ Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 73.

¹⁰⁹ The most recent study of this phenomenon is Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in Howat, 71–90.

¹¹⁰ Burke and Voorsanger, 73.

¹¹¹ Burke and Voorsanger, 73.

¹¹² Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting" (Letter 1, January 3, 1855) in Harold Spencer, ed., *American Art: Readings from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 91.

¹¹³ Patricia Hills, "Painting Race: Eastman Johnson's Pictures of Slaves, Ex-Slaves and Freedmen," in Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hills, *Eastman Johnson: Painting America* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 158.

¹¹⁴ For the role of the fine arts in Victorian domestic culture see Katherine C. Grier, "The Decline of the Memory Palace: the Parlor after 1890," in Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth eds., *American Home Life 1880–1930: A Social History of Spaces and Service* (Knoxville: The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1992), 49–74.

¹¹⁵ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869). Frederick and Julia were friends and avid readers of Horace Bushnell, a frequent visitor to Woodstock and an anti-Transcendentalist. A "conservationist," by the definition of the period, Bushnell was also a friend of the railroad, but so was almost everyone else, including Emerson, with the striking exceptions of George Perkins Marsh and Henry David Thoreau. For this "unholy alliance" of commerce and conservation see R. J. Orsi, "Wilderness Saint and Robber Baron: John Muir and the Southern Pacific," *The Pacific Historian* 29 (1985), 136–52.

¹¹⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 12.

¹¹⁷ For an excellent account of the Victorian home as Church see Colleen McDannell, "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," in Foy and Schlereth, eds., *American Home Life*, 162–189.

¹¹⁸ See Macleod.

¹¹⁹ See Nathaniel Burt, *Palaces for the People: A Social History of the American Art Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1977), 80–85 for the problem of "Old Masters" in Gilded Age America and the practices of unscrupulous art dealers like "Old Pfaff" who single-handedly gave the practice of collecting them a bad name.

¹²⁰ Macleod, 16.

¹²¹ Macleod, 4, 29. Macleod further contends that "social convention prohibited women from being collectors. . . . Aesthetic theorists maintained that the female mind was incapable of comprehending ideas which did not relate to the personal realm." Even where women displayed an interest in collecting, "they were duty bound to leaving the bargaining and financial side of artistic consumption to their husbands and thus their names do not appear in artists diaries and dealer's account books." The major exception among New York's Victorian collectors was Catherine Lorillard Wolfe, the only woman listed among one hundred and six original contributors to the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Listed by one newspaper in 1876 as a "famous collector," she left her art at her death, "for the enjoyment and recreation of all . . . and also with a view to the education and cultivation of the public taste for the fine arts," to the M.M.A., which refurbished a gallery in 1887 bearing her name. See Rebecca A. Rabinow, "Catherine Lorillard Wolfe: The First Woman Benefactor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Apollo* (March, 1998), 48–55.

¹²² The Parmly family, as the extensive research of Janet Houghton has revealed, was well connected to the New York art world. Julia's older sister Mary Montagu Parmly married Charles H. Ward, a prominent "patron of the arts." Mansion Box 31 contains an invitation list to a "musical soirée" given by Mary Montagu Parmly Ward and her husband, dated December 21, 1865. Among invited guests were artists Frederick Church, Worthington Whittredge, John F. Kensett and Anton Wenzler. The gift of a "sketch" for *Shrewsbury River* from Kensett to "Miss Julia Parmly, May 30, 1856" has been cited in the catalogue as evidence of her early connections with artists.

¹²³ Mansion Box A 12: *Memoirs of Julia Parmly Billings*, 4. The estate library contains no fewer than eight volumes of the works of Anna Jameson, including *A Commonplace Book of Thoughts, Memories, and Fancies* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854) signed by Julia Parmly in London, 1855.

¹²⁴ Among the invited guests at the wedding of Anna Ehrick Parmly and Thomas Pritchard Rossiter, which took place on October 15, 1851, were artists John Frederick Kensett and Louis Lang.

¹²⁵ Mansion Box A 12: *Memoirs*, 4.

¹²⁶ Mansion Box A 12: *Memoirs*, 10.

¹²⁷ Mansion Box A 12: *Travel Diary of Julia Parmly* (1855, unpaginated).

¹²⁸ For the Victorian worship of Raphael as the world's greatest painter see Marjorie B. Cohn, *Francis Calley Gray and Art Collecting in America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986). Cohn thoroughly explores the Victorian "cultural cliché" of collecting engravings of Raphael Madonnas, a practice from which Julia was far from immune, noting that Rafaellomania had been given royal sanction by no less a personage than Prince Albert.

¹²⁹ This is a reference to the now seldom viewed fresco of *The Annunciation* by an anonymous Tuscan painter that was a major tourist attraction during the Victorian era. Today art lovers visit Santissima Annunziata to view the famous frescoes in the narthex, but remain largely unaware of the shrine.

¹³⁰ According to Julia's account there was a sign posted outside "Il Powers" studio stating that he no longer received visitors, but as they were leaving he opened the door and invited them in. Julia noted that "he has a good deal of the 'Down East' manner."

¹³¹ Mansion Box A 12: *Travel Diary*. Presumably Julia's reference to Crawford's sculpture is to the *Armed America* (1851) for the dome of the Capitol in Washington D. C.

¹³² For a dashing view of Read's Florence Studio see Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists* (Southampton: The Parrish Art Museum, 1997), fig. 13. Read, costumed as a Renaissance gentleman-painter, stands before a portrait of a Victorian belle.

¹³³ Mansion Box A 12: *Diaries of Julia Parmly Billings*: 3/6/1884, 3/8/1884, 5/10/1884, 1/6/1886.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 10/5/1884: "He [Frederick] bought a pretty watercolor at Lanthier's for \$30 that had cost \$200."

¹³⁵ Louis Lanthier was Frederick Billings' favorite New York art dealer. His name is frequently mentioned in both Frederick's and Julia's diaries. Owner of "The Old Curiosity Shop," he specialized in Oriental ceramics as well as paintings. The only published information on Lanthier states that "he was an authority on old pictures, porcelains, furniture, silverware, antique jewelry, armor, precious stones, and the dress and customs of different periods of history." Peter Hastings Falk, ed., *Who Was Who in American Art: Compiled from the Original Thirty-three Volumes of American Art Annual* (New York: Sound View Press, 1985), 358. Lanthier's name does not appear in the Smithsonian Institution's *Archives of American Art*, the most comprehensive source for nineteenth century art and artists. Information about the New York art market at the time of the Billingses remains sketchy. The most important New York art dealer of the period, Samuel Putnam Avery, the agent for such celebrated collectors as John Taylor Johnston and William H. Vanderbilt, does not list the Billingses among his clients. See Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfield and Jeanne K. Welcher, *The Diaries 1871-1882 of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer* (New York: Arno Press, 1979).

¹³⁶ The only reference found in Julia's diary to a painting that held personal meaning occurred on 3/7/1870 where she mentions that Frederick sent to Woodstock from New York "my picture *Fast Asleep*." The painting, Sophie Gengembre Anderson's *Fast Asleep*, is still at Woodstock. A letter of condolence upon Frederick's death from painter Jasper Cropsey to Julia Billings (Mansion Box A 31) indicates some continuing connection to the New York art community.

¹³⁷ See the exchange of letters between Frederick Billings and Frederic Edwin Church concerning the commission for the "four feet picture" *Evening in the Tropics*, in which Julia's opinions are decisive. See also Julia's diary entries for 3/1/1884, 5/29/1885, 1/6/1886 and 1/14/1886 where she repeatedly uses "we" to describe her and Frederick's responses to works of art. Nowhere in the diaries is there expressed a conflict of opinion about a work of art. Julia's diary entry for 1/15/1886 is suggestive: "Mary and I had a happy hour at Kurtz where she had two good pictures. I took her to L[anthier's] to see three bought by F. 40, 120, 290 [\$]."

¹³⁸ *Julia Parmly Billings Diary* for 1886: 6/5/1886: "F hung and changed pictures."; 7/2/1886: "F hung pictures in the dining room"; 7/3/1886: "F hung more pictures in the d[ining room] and about"; 7/6/1886: "F had F[rederick] C[hapman] on hand to hang pictures. Uphill work" (Chapman was a foreman at the Woodstock estate); 7/19/1886: "F was very busy hanging our picture in the parlor"; 7/16/1886: "F. was very busy hanging pictures."

¹³⁹ Mansion Box A 31. The letter concerns a painting by George Henry Boughton ("one of his finest works never seen in this country before. If you would like a good specimen of his work—call and see it") rather than Bierstadt's own work.

¹⁴⁰ See Mansion Box A 31: Letters from Harry Chase, 3/12/1875, R. Swain Gifford (date?) concerning commissioned paintings. Letter from Rose Durfee, Sales Agent for the National Academy of Design, 5/6/1879, about works by Sanford Gifford. See *Diaries of Julia Parmly Billings* (Mansion Box A 12), entries for 3/1/1884: "F. and I went to the academy & bought the watercolor by Ed. Moran "Coming into Port"—several less important. We

were there about 2-1/2 hrs." 1/14/1886: "After some writing F. & I went to Lanthier's and then I picked out some pictures at the Morgan sale for L[anthier?] to bid on."

¹⁴¹ See Blaugrund.

¹⁴² Blaugrund, 101.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Blaugrund, 85. Frederick is listed as an active member from 1869 to 1890 but is nowhere mentioned in the histories of the Association. See The Century Association, New York, *The Century 1847–1946* (New York: The Century Association, 1947). For a revealing document of this institution see Charles Yardley Turner's painting entitled *A Saturday Evening at the Century Association* (The Century Association, 1894). Reproduced in Blaugrund, fig. 43.

¹⁴⁴ See Burt, 90–95 for the role of the Union League Club in the formation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

¹⁴⁵ Burt, 84.



Charles Théodore Frère,
Bab Hussinichaw (n.d.),
Marsh-Billings Rockefeller
National Historical Park.

Part II: Nineteenth Century American Landscape Painting and the Environmental Movement

“I received from it [John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*] a stimulus to nature worship, to which I was already too much inclined which made ineffaceable the confusion in my mind between nature and art.”

—William James Stillman *The Autobiography of a Journalist*¹⁴⁶

John Ruskin and the “Mirror Of Nature”

As suggested by Stillman’s youthful confession, the boundary between nature and art was not always clearly demarcated during the Victorian era. The founder of America’s first art journal, Stillman was a landscape painter and belonged to the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art, the American branch of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.¹⁴⁷ Like his British mentor John Ruskin, Stillman viewed art as the mirror of nature and its purpose “the earnest loving study of God’s work.” Another Victorian art critic, reviewing an exhibition of landscape paintings at Boston’s venerable Athenaeum, fervently articulated Ruskin’s moral view of the educated appreciation of art: “It is certain from experience, that a familiar observation of the beautiful forms of nature and the imitations of expressions of them in works of art, has the effect of cherishing the benevolent affections, repressing evil passion, and improving the general tone of moral feeling.”¹⁴⁸

Historian Roger Stein has claimed that Ruskin’s fundamental importance to Americans was “his identification of the interest in art with morality and religion as well as with the love of nature, his ability to build a loose but convincing system where art, religion, and nature were inextricably

intertwined.”¹⁴⁹ In 1855, art critic Clarence Cook reaffirmed America’s response to Ruskin’s doctrines: “We love his love of nature, we love his love of God. He carries us along with him by his enthusiasm.”¹⁵⁰ At the close of the century, the Reverend Julius Ward reiterated Ruskin’s vital role in shaping the appreciation of the natural world by teaching “what is transcendental in poetry and art. All our poets and students of nature are under the spell of this enthusiasm.”¹⁵¹ A few years later, the eccentric Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead, one of Ruskin’s most impressionable students at Oxford’s Balliol College, founded an arts and crafts colony at Woodstock in New York’s Catskill mountains. Based upon Ruskin’s anti-modernist aesthetic and social doctrines, the Woodstock colony sought to realize the master’s utopian program in the forests and mountains of North America.¹⁵² To this day Ruskin’s Romantic vision of harmony between man and nature, whether acknowledged or not, continues to resonate within the American environmental movement.¹⁵³

Ruskin’s views are also intertwined with the emergence of the nation’s first impulses to conserve nature. The canon of American nature writing, for example, is deeply infiltrated by Ruskinians. Thomas Starr King, Samuel Bowles, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, Clarence King, and John Muir, to cite but a

few of the better known, were all professed followers of the British prophet. Many of the landscape artists, who in paint, photography and print made the first calls for the protection of nature, were also pilgrims traveling Ruskin's "New Path."¹⁵⁴ In recognition of their vital achievement in promoting appreciation for nature, there are today in the state and national parks and forests of the United States more topographic sites named after painters than in any other country in the world. Mount Thomas Cole and Church's Ledge in the Catskills, Champney Falls in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Moran Point at Grand Canyon, Mount Moran in Grand Teton National Park and Mount Bierstadt in Rocky Mountain National Park are among the best known and celebrated natural monuments honoring artists and their role in shaping the nineteenth century's veneration of nature. Similar claims can be made for many of the Romantic nature writers, Thomas Starr King enjoying the unique distinction of having mountains named after him both in the White Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. Assuredly no other nation on earth has paid such high and enduring tribute to its cultural elite in the designation of scenery.

A case in point is the renaming of Mount Thomas Cole in New York's Catskill mountains. In none of the early guidebooks to the historic region is there any mention of a mountain dedicated to the father of the Hudson River School. It is only on the United States Geological Survey Map of 1894 that Mount Thomas Cole (3975') appears next to Blackhead and Black Dome. Insofar as 1894 is the year in which the state legislation was passed creating the Catskill Forest Preserve, it is a near certainty that the redesignation of Black Mountain as Mount Thomas Cole was a tribute to the artist's role in promoting values leading to forest preservation of the region.

The Origins of American Environmentalism

Environmental historians are currently divided on the sources of the early movements to protect nature. The predominant view, first articulated by Samuel P. Hays in the 1950s and more recently reaffirmed by Philip Shabecoff, is that the initial impulse for environmental protection was a product of the urban elite.¹⁵⁵ As Shabecoff has claimed, the emotional, psychological and scientific imperatives for conservation arose from "the scholars, poets, philosophers, scientists, writers, painters, clerics, and even the politicians of the settled, increasingly urbanized East."¹⁵⁶ Fortifying this view, for example, is the claim of a former governor of Wyoming that government policy was being shaped by "college professors and landscape gardeners," or the utterance of a turn-of-the-century Denver journalist who famously fumed: "Along comes a poet and suggests a national park in an area that ought to teem with inhabitants."¹⁵⁷

In opposition to this elitist account, historians like Richard Judd have tended to stress regional populism and "common stewardship" as the principal determinants of the conservation movement.¹⁵⁸ In his partisan view, farmers and rural landowners, rather than urban poets and philosophers, first articulated the need for conservation and began to act upon it. Interestingly enough, Frederick Billings could be understood to fall into either of these camps. As Attorney General of California, his defense of Rincon Point is best understood in relation to the precedent of the New England commons, while his advocacy of Yosemite is clearly connected to his associations with Thomas Starr King and Frederick Law Olmsted. Without taking sides in the debate on the origins of conservation, it is important to note that this debate is often framed in a reductive manner. The cultural habits of

humanity are far too complex and eccentric to label individuals solely as Utilitarians or Romantics, sportsmen or philosophers, farmers or tourists.¹⁵⁹

In many ways the most insightful treatment of the origins of environmentalism is the work of Alfred Runte, who has devoted a number of studies to the subject. His recent publication *Public Lands, Public Heritage: The National Forest Idea* (1991) contains an especially sophisticated analysis of the role of aesthetics as “the second important cornerstone of American conservation.”¹⁶⁰ Citing the painters of the Hudson River School, George Perkins Marsh and the Appalachian Mountain Club as primary agents in the blurring of the distinction between forests as resource and beauty in the Victorian mind, he has produced an extremely nuanced context for the subject. Perhaps his most startling conclusion is that the nineteenth century’s synthesis of the pragmatic and the aesthetic in the cause of forest conservation has since devolved into competing spheres of interest.¹⁶¹

In a canonic study of the historic origins of national parks, Runte has argued persuasively that they were first established to combat “cultural anxiety” about the perceived inadequacies of the new nation in the eyes of foreign visitors.¹⁶² Citing a host of English critics engaged in cultural warfare with their lost colonies, Runte carefully documents the process whereby raw nature was transformed into monumental works of art. “Monumentalism,” in his thoughtful formulation, emerged as the foundational premise of American conservation with “scenic preservation” as its primary goal. Yosemite, Yellowstone and Grand Canyon, according to Runte, were the foremost products of “scenic nationalism.” “By and large,” Runte asserts, “national parks were considered a visual experience; their purpose was not to preserve nature as an integral whole, but to seek out the most impressive waterfalls, canyons and mountain peaks of

the West.”¹⁶³ If America lacked museums stocked with artistic treasures, it possessed an abundance of natural aesthetic monuments to take their place and, in American eyes, to surpass the masterpieces of European art and architecture.

Artists and the Environmental Movement

The goal of this essay is not to essentialize artistic production, nor to make exaggerated claims on behalf of artists, but rather to focus upon their role in the creation of environmental consciousness. As custodians of nineteenth century visual culture, painters and photographers had a vital stake in defining the nation’s physical and moral geography. As shapers of the cultural definition of nature they, together with a host of writers, were instrumental in determining that specific geographic regions matching that definition became national parks and other publicly administered land such as forest preserves and state parks. Artists, however, like most Victorians, were constantly oscillating between the poles of utility and beauty when it suited their purposes, and, in the case of the Ruskinians, seldom possessed a very clear picture of the borders between nature and its representation. Myth, memory and allegory may have been part of their cultural apparatus, but so too was commodification, measurement and science.¹⁶⁴ As photographer Ansel Adams has noted, the difference between Half Dome and a piece of rock is the artist’s mediating presence.¹⁶⁵

The critical insight that pictures actually generate ideas about nature belongs to the theoreticians of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁶⁶ The Venetian Lodovico Dolce, for example, observed the power of the image to displace reality when he described the landscape background of a Titian painting as so plausible that “reality itself is not so real.”¹⁶⁷ During the eighteenth century English

gentlemen customarily carried with them on pedestrian excursions into nature the "Claude Box."¹⁶⁸ A smoked glass lens enclosed by wooden casing, the "Claude Box" allowed viewers to select and enframe those aspects of scenery which most closely approximated the landscape paintings of the seventeenth century Frenchman Claude Lorrain. Through this scopic process of composition, the so-called "picturesque" habit of perception, nature could be made to imitate art.¹⁶⁹ While Ruskin and his nineteenth century followers rejected the picturesque apprehension of nature, advocating instead the closest possible simulation of nature by art, they were fully conscious of the power of pictorial formulations to shape the values and perceptions that accrue to the phenomenal world. When Ruskin avowed that "the best image that the world can give of Paradise, is in the slope of the meadows, orchards and cornfields on the side of a great Alp, with its purple rocks and eternal snows above," he was giving voice to a vision of the land and its image, of place and its picture, that first entered the western imagination five hundred years earlier. When Frederick Billings' close friend Thomas Starr King died in March of 1864, his role in shaping the apprehension of American nature was commemorated by New York divine Henry Whitney Bellows.¹⁷⁰ "No one had really seen the Sierra Nevada, Mount Shasta, the Yo Semite Valley, or the coast of Oregon and the region of Mount Hood," Bellows exclaimed, "until his [Starr King's] fine eye saw and his cunning brain and hand depicted them."¹⁷¹ Photographer William Henry Jackson made similar claims about the paintings of Thomas Moran and their impact on popular perceptions of the West: "The snowy Sierras, the lofty Tetons and the Yellowstone country or the Grand Canyon of the Colorado [are] incomparable panoramas which the world will long continue to see in terms of his

compositions."¹⁷²

Reification, the act of substituting an image for what it represents, was commonly practiced by John Ruskin and his American followers. Following the prophet's mimetic dictates, landscape art came often to lose, through the illusory capacity to deny its own making, the sense that it was made at all. More conveniently accessible than "reality," landscape art often came to displace its referent as a means of conceptualizing nature. The fact that the first federal legislation on behalf of scenic protection was conferred on mountainous landscapes, previously enshrined by paintings, prints and photographs, affirms the complex dialogue between culture and nature in the emergent practices of American conservation.¹⁷³

Even the language we use to designate a tract of land, of whatever extent, is derived from the pictorial arts. The term "landscape," whether we acknowledge it or not, introduces "notions of value and form which relate not just to seeing the land, but to seeing it in a certain way—pictorially."¹⁷⁴ In his thoughtful study of Romantic American literature, Donald Ringe has carefully analyzed the structure of what he terms "the pictorial mode . . . a style of writing that is dependent upon the art of the landscape painter."¹⁷⁵ "Wherever one turns in the literature of the [Romantic] period," Ringe writes, "one is likely to find a recurring strain of the pictorial, a stress on images of sight, and a deep concern with the need for close and accurate observation of the physical world in order to discern its meaning."¹⁷⁶ The noun "overlook," to provide but one example, first entered the English language in 1861 through the writings of American art critic Louis Legrand Noble when describing a painting by Thomas Cole's pupil Frederic Edwin Church.¹⁷⁷ Since that time countless mountains, ledges, parks and country homes, including Thomas Cole's most beloved Catskill peak, have been named "Overlook."

Any attempt to understand the relationship of art to environmentalism must of necessity define the terms “conservation” and “preservation” as held by the Victorians. Even a brief perusal of primary sources suggests that their meanings differed substantially from contemporary usage. The term conservation, understood in Gifford Pinchot’s formulation as “wise use” of physical resources and as an alternative to strict preservation, was not introduced into the national discourse until the turn of the century when the first Director of the National Forest Service and John Muir began to sharpen their definition in the debate over Hetch Hetchy.¹⁷⁸ Prior to that conflict, the concept of “preservation” was expansive enough to include every position on the environmental spectrum and to embrace most of today’s competing views. When, for example, artists like George Catlin and Thomas Cole invoked the term “preservation,” they generally meant preservation on canvas of scenic value. In their view the image would serve as a nostalgic reminder of that which was ineluctably destined to vanish, whether Indians, bison or forests. Catlin expressed this conviction with confessional poignancy in a famous mission statement: “Deeply impressed by the irresistible fate awaiting these poor people [Indians], I conceived a plan of making a pictorial history of those vanishing races.” Comparing Indians to still life painting, he contended, “They are a basket of dead game, harassed, bleeding and dead. . . . Phoenix like they will arise from the stain of the painter’s palette and live on canvas. My works will be a monument to a dying race and to myself.” On another infamous occasion, Catlin’s father gave voice to his son’s ambition with chilling clarity: “Though my son mourns the dreadful destiny of the Indian tribes by small pox, this shocking calamity will greatly increase the value of his works.”¹⁷⁹

Thomas Cole expressed related sentiments when he cast a malediction upon

“dollar godded utilitarians” for cutting down the trees near his studio in Catskill, even before the varnish had dried on one of his forest scenes.¹⁸⁰ “The ravages of the axe are daily increasing,” he lamented, “desecration by what is called improvement; which as yet generally destroys Nature’s beauty without substituting that of Art.”¹⁸¹ The artist’s task, he felt, was not only to document, but alchemically to “preserve” on canvas, wild nature doomed by expediency. According to his biographer Louis Legrand Noble, Cole contemplated writing a book on art, one of whose themes was “the wilderness passing away, and the necessity of saving and perpetuating its features.”¹⁸² In his seminal history of the environmental movement *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) Roderick Nash understood this to mean that Cole was advocating the actual “preservation” of land.¹⁸³ In point of fact the painter was stating the conviction that pictures (“what nature denies/art supplies”) were the only means of effectively preserving wild nature for posterity. Art, in short, was about arresting in paint that which was rapidly passing away before the juggernaut of progress. Reviewing in 1847 two landscapes by Cole’s Hudson River colleague Jasper Cropsey, a critic for *The Literary World* mandated the artist’s privileged role:

The axe of civilization is busy with our old forests, and artisan ingenuity is fast sweeping away the relics of our national infancy. . . . Where were once the wild and picturesque haunts of the Red Man, and where the wild deer roamed in freedom are becoming the abodes of commerce and the seats of manufactures. . . . Yankee enterprise has little sympathy with the picturesque, and it behooves our artists to rescue from its grasp the little that is left, before it is too late.¹⁸⁴

For many Victorians, as Stillman's account of reading Ruskin intimates, the painted image could be made to stand in for reality itself while serving as a rhetorical screen behind which wilderness might vanish altogether, leaving only its memory.

Art, Language and the Invention of Yosemite Valley and Yellowstone National Park

When Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the first commissioners of the newly created Yosemite "park," wrote an 1865 advisory report for the California Legislature, his idea of "preservation" was allied with that of artists and photographers. On the one hand, the report issued a warning against "natural scenes of an impressive character" becoming "private property" and "Niagarized" (overly commercialized). On the other, it affirmed the role of therapeutic contemplation of "scenes of beauty" as "favorable to the health and vigor of men," especially those "pressed by their business or household cares." Lack of scenic recreation, he asserted, can result in "mental disability . . . paralysis, palsy, monomania, or insanity, but most frequently of mental and nervous excitability [neurasthenia] . . . incapacitating the subject for the proper exercise of the intellectual or moral forces." In a familiar Victorian litany, he conceded that "the power of scenery to affect men is, in a large way proportionate to the degree of their civilization and the degree in which their taste has been cultivated."¹⁸⁵ In short, what needed preservation was scenic beauty as defined by the artistic culture, but not the raw matter of wilderness for its own sake. Never an advocate of uncultivated nature, Olmsted considered the inordinate love of the wild a "vulgar blunder." "Peaceful, pastoral beauty," in his view, constituted the highest aesthetic and the scenic probity of Yosemite.¹⁸⁶ Seeking to strengthen his position, Olmsted did not hesitate to enlist,

as consultants on the future of the park, painters Vergil Williams and Thomas Hill, together with photographer Carleton Watkins.¹⁸⁷ In Roderick Nash's succinct characterization of the motives of America's early preservationists: "A wilderness was the last thing they wanted."¹⁸⁸

Almost every historic study of the creation of the Yosemite and Yellowstone "parks" acknowledges the critical role of landscape art in promoting the enabling Federal legislation. The impact of the imagery of Albert Bierstadt and Carleton Watkins in shaping the values associated with Yosemite is set alongside the equally formative work of Thomas Moran and William Henry Jackson in the debates over the Yellowstone.¹⁸⁹ Painters and photographers, according to this argument, conspired to present legislators with sublimely Romantic images of place that resonated with their inherited cultural vision. With characteristic generosity, Jackson claimed that Moran's mountainous landscapes "did a work which no other agency could do and doubtless convinced every one who saw them that the regions where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the people forever."¹⁹⁰ In the hyperventilated formulation of another environmental enthusiast: "Romanticism saved the West."¹⁹¹

In the grand national project of scenic salvation the word, more than the image, was more constrained by the often perverse vagaries of "reality." Frustrated by the scale and "otherness" of the western landforms, writers were often reduced to the invocation of "picturesque" aesthetics to describe these diverse regions, while visual artists, less impaired by the imaginative defects of language, were able to adopt a more flexible strategy for valorizing natural scenery. Where words faltered, where the limits of language had been reached, writers were thrown back on imported European formulas to describe the American wilderness. Confronted with

a vastness and enormity of scale that thwarted description, they were obliged to conceptualize such places as Yosemite and Yellowstone as “parks,” designations that remain to this day. One early guidebook to the Yellowstone was mindful of the problem of nomenclature, warning travelers not to expect “beautifully aligned walks and roadways, carpet-like lawns, formal beds of flowers, and other features of the conventional city park . . . and it does indeed seem, at first sight, as if the name was a little out of place when applied to such a region.”¹⁹² In striking contrast to the genteel, pastoral vision evoked by the term “park,” artists were able to draw upon a more complex code of imagery for the representation of the American wilderness.¹⁹³ The sister arts, it would seem, were traveling by separate paths to the same destination, but where writers found gardens, painters and photographers envisaged sublime spectacles of mountains and cataracts.

On their respective pilgrimages, words were neither as foot-loose nor as fancy-free as pictures.¹⁹⁴ Overwhelmed by the immensity of western spaces, writers struggled to convey dimensions, while artists, especially photographers like Watkins and Jackson, more easily overcame the inherent limitation of visual representation, temporality, by the creation of extensive suites of sequential imagery.¹⁹⁵ Vicariously experiencing the journey serially unfolded by photographs, the armchair tourist could undertake an unprecedented virtual pilgrimage to scenic places. Descending from mountain heights into the walled sanctuary of Yosemite Valley, or alternatively, traversing the vast spaces of the Yellowstone, the urban pilgrim could—especially with the assistance of a stereoscope for heightened three-dimensional viewing—relive the primal encounter of surveyors and explorers with “wilderness.”¹⁹⁶ So compellingly persuasive was the photographic recreation

of the western landscape for many Victorians that travel itself could be viewed as a dispensable nuisance. The Reverend H. J. Morton, upon first viewing photographs of Yosemite at Goupil’s New York Gallery, was moved to observe that Watkins’

photographic views . . . open before us the wonderful valley whose features far surpass the fancies of the most imaginative poet and eager romancer. . . Without crossing the continent by the overland route in dread of scalping Indians and waterless plains; without braving the dangers of the sea by the Changres and Panama route; nay without even the trouble of the brief land trip from San Francisco, we are able to step, as it were, from our study into the wonders of the wondrous valley, and gaze at our leisure on its amazing features.¹⁹⁷

Not only were words surpassed, but reality itself was brought under scrutiny, if not outright surpassed, by the refined lens of “the mirror of nature.” No doubt Edward L. Wilson, editor of the art journal *The Philadelphia Photographer*, had something like this in mind when, in reference to Watkins’ Yosemite suite, he wrote: “It has been said that ‘the pen is mightier than the sword,’ but who shall not say that in this instance, at least, the camera is mightier than the pen.”¹⁹⁸

When contrasted with Bierstadt’s and Watkins’ operatic visions, verbal accounts of Yosemite, ranging from Lafayette Bunnell’s description of the valley as presenting the “appearance of a well kept park” (1851) to John Muir’s initial perception of it “dressed like an artificial landscape-garden” (1869), seem gentrified and defanged.¹⁹⁹ As Bierstadt’s publicist, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, laconically observed on first viewing Yosemite: “Never were words so beggared for an abridged translation of any Scripture of Nature.”²⁰⁰ Pressed for an apt comparison,

the travel writer Bayard Taylor resorted to describing the valley as classical sculpture: "a gallery of master-pieces, which I should not be afraid to place beside those of the Vatican and the Louvre. Types of beauty and grace I had already—the Apollo, the Antinous, the Faun, even the Gladiator—but here were the Heraclidae, the Titans."²⁰¹ Never at a loss for words in describing the blandishments of New Hampshire's White Mountains, Universalist minister Thomas Starr King also found the task of describing the Yosemite valley beyond him. "How can I express the awe and joy that were blended and continually struggling with each other," he rhetorically exclaimed, "during the half hour in the hot noon that we remained on the edge of the abyss where the grandeurs of the Yo-Semite were revealed to us." Overcoming his verbal inhibitions, Starr King expressed his inability to find a known cultural model: "Nowhere among the Alps, in no pass of the Andes . . . is there such stupendous rock scenery as the traveler now lifts his eyes to."²⁰² Journalist Samuel Bowles, giving voice to the popular conceit, exclaimed: "THE YOSEMITE! As well interpret God in thirty-nine articles as portray it to you by word of mouth or pen."²⁰³

In lifting his eyes and mind from the valley floor to the rocky heights, Starr King was employing an alternative mode of verbal description for mountain scenery, derived from the writings of John Ruskin. In the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, devoted to the gloom and glory of the sublime, Ruskin defined mountains as works of sacred art. "Full of treasures of illuminated manuscript for the scholar, kindly in simple lessons for the worker," he intoned, "quiet in pale cloisters for the thinker, glorious in holiness for the worshipper," mountains are the "earth's natural cathedrals."²⁰⁴ Inadvertently legitimating the cultural value of the American landscape by dispensing with the need for storied association (the English-Romantic theory of the "picturesque"

that privileged landscape associated with historic events, a doctrine inherently inimical to Britain's former colony), Ruskin empowered countless American nature writers, including Starr King, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, Clarence King, John Muir, Horace Greeley and Samuel Bowles.²⁰⁵ Once again transcending his temporarily suspended powers of verbal description, Bowles defined Yosemite's Cathedral Rocks and Cathedral Spires by invoking Ruskin's canonic paradigm: for him they replicated "the great impressiveness, the beauty and the fantastic form of Gothic architecture." In gazing upon the "mountain tabernacles," he contended, "it is easy to imagine . . . that you are under the ruins of an old Gothic cathedral, to which those of Cologne and Milan are but baby houses."²⁰⁶ Approaching the limits of known rhetoric, Yosemite finally became for Bowles "the confrontal of God face to face, as in great danger, in solemn, sudden death. It was Niagara magnified."²⁰⁷ In the end, these fashionably gothic effusions were as grounded in inherited European aesthetic conventions (and as frustrated by American realities) as the bucolic utterances of the pastoralists.

Not to be outdone by writers, artists too, in self-serving acts of deprecation, admitted to being overcome by their inability to capture on canvas that which stood before them in nature. Reflecting upon numerous attempts to depict the Yosemite valley, William Keith was compelled to admit that "art has its limitation and in imitating nature the artist is at the greatest disadvantage because he is trying to do the impossible."²⁰⁸ Despite his humble disclaimer, Keith, like most writers dilating upon Yosemite, did not refrain from attempting the "impossible" as long as there existed a market for it.²⁰⁹

A similar pattern emerges when the first calls for Yellowstone to become "a public park forever" are contrasted with the stern visual confections of the region by Thomas "Yellowstone" Moran.²¹⁰ Gazing into the

chasm of the Yellowstone river, Gustavus C. Doane, a young lieutenant accompanying the Washburn expedition of 1870, declared, "the mind struggles and then falls back upon itself despairing in the effort to grasp by a single thought the idea of its immensity."²¹¹ One member of the party, N. P. Langford, later to become the first director of the park and afterwards known as "National Park" Langford, drew on the well-traveled cathedral metaphor, in his description of the rock formations above Tower Falls: "Some resemble towers, others the spires of churches, and others still shoot up as lithe and slender as the minarets of a mosque." In the end, however, "the solemn grandeur of the scene surpasses description. It must be seen to be felt." In privileging the visual over the verbal, Langford was simultaneously subverting his own wordy project: "You feel the absence of sound, the oppression of absolute silence."²¹² Moran, who was not on the expedition and thus was unencumbered by the imperatives of "reality," produced a body of sublime images based on Langford's tepid prose that far surpass in imaginative power their verbal source.²¹³ Moran's empurpled illustrations were employed by Langford and Jay Cooke of the Northern Pacific to lobby Congress on behalf of the Yellowstone and persuaded Ferdinand V. Hayden to enlist Moran as artist for the 1871 expedition.

Upon return from the 1871 expedition and loath to permit nature to be trumped by art, Hayden hastened to point out in his testimony before Congress that Yellowstone's "gothic columns" possessed "greater variety and more striking colors than ever adorned a work of human art." "Decorations more beautiful than human art ever conceived," he cautioned, must be delivered from the fate that befell Niagara Falls.²¹⁴ No less a celebrity than General William "Tecumseh" Sherman, upon first viewing Thomas Moran's panoramic *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, was equally dubious about the capacity of

art or letters to express the inexpressible: "The painting by Moran is good," he avowed, "but painting and words are unequal to the subject."²¹⁵ Despite the inability of art to rival nature, the assertion seemed only to hasten the naming the geysers of the Norris Basin "Artists' Paintpots" ("arranged with a precision so exact that it would delight the heart of the most methodical artist in Christendom") or the park, as a whole, the "Nation's Art Gallery."²¹⁶ By invoking the museum metaphor for Yellowstone, writers became complicit with artists in the cultural project of converting the dynamic flux of nature into static monuments of art.

In 1872 when the Secretary of the Interior defined the aim of the impending Yellowstone Act "to preserve it as a public park or pleasuring ground," he too was engaging the limits of language to express landscape value.²¹⁷ Even John Muir, whose verbal rhapsodies mounted to unprecedented heights at Yosemite (into whose "mountain mansions Nature had taken pains to gather her choicest treasures to draw her lovers into close and confiding communion with her"), confessed to being stupefied by the spectacle of the Yellowstone.²¹⁸ In his view, it belonged "to some other world," one that required "a coinage of new words . . . to convey this varied and continual color, and give an intelligent conception of the commotion of waters."²¹⁹ Turning to the sister art, he reluctantly concluded, "all the earth hereabouts seems to be paint."²²⁰ Confounded by Yellowstone's unfamiliar spaces, colors and atmosphere, nature's foremost rhapsodist was at a loss to characterize a place that was anything but park-like.²²¹

When the Northern Pacific sponsored painter Thomas Moran for the 1871 Hayden survey of the Yellowstone, he was described as "an artist of much genius, who desires to take sketches in the upper Yellowstone region, from which to paint some fine

pictures on his return. That he will surpass Bierstadt's 'Yosemite,' we who know him best fully believe."²²² Introducing the snake of commerce into the garden, competition between railroad lines translated into staged artistic rivalries.²²³ Visual artists, typically more driven by market considerations, Social Darwinian critics, and the politics of patronage than were writers, were spurred to intense levels of competition in theatricalizing the landscape.²²⁴ If the western parks are understood as America's "first massively endowed works of art," then invidious comparisons between them were inevitable and artists, to whom it fell to fashion a desirable image, were perforce impelled to pay homage to the parks (and to themselves) through ever climaxing pictorial exertions. When the boundaries of a scenic paradigm had been reached, new ones were found waiting in the wings.²²⁵

Art, Railroads and the National Park Movement

Historically the debate over the formation of the national parks has been framed by arguments, which have set utility against spirituality.²²⁶ Suspicious of any claims that privilege art, many environmental historians have, predictably, invoked conspiracy theory, such as the collusion of banking and railroad interests, as a principal determinant in the rise of the preservationist movement. Initially the American Steamship Transit Line, and later the Southern Pacific railroad in Yosemite and the Northern Pacific in Yellowstone, are cited as chief agents in securing passage of the respective bills. In this account greed and self-interest, combined with cynical manipulation of artists to provide an aesthetic smoke screen for the railroad's real motives, brought about the legislation on behalf of America's scenic wonders.²²⁷ What drops out of this account is an understanding that artists, by enlisting the theory of the

sublime in the representation of these sites, were *de facto* designating them as possessing no resource value. Writers, in comparison, through over-reliance on the aesthetics of the "picturesque," were in fact equating Yosemite and the Yellowstone with an English garden, thereby lending weight to the claim that such places were fertile and exploitable.²²⁸ Conscious of this linguistic dilemma, late-century supporters of the New York state legislation on behalf of the Adirondack and Catskill regions deliberately eschewed the term "park" in favor of "forest preserve" (the designation "park" has since been attached to both places).²²⁹ The modern association of "amusement" or "theme" with the term "park" doubtless afforded the weight of contumely of a 1920s Denver journalist for Stephen Mather, first director of the Park Service: "He preached parks, pictured parks, planned parks, played parks on the clangorous cymbal and cooing lute until one is afraid not to go see parks. One dreads a parkless death."²³⁰

Painters and photographers, in reconfiguring the chosen sites as sublime spectacle rather than picturesque park, incorporated into their selective vision the aesthetic theories of such philosophers as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant.²³¹ Boundless waste, forlorn desolation, and the capacity to elicit "terror inspired by fear" is, in the famous formulation of Burke, "the ruling principle of the sublime." These qualities were drawn upon by Hayden in his testimony before Congress on the non-economic value of the Yellowstone. Identical claims were made about the unsuitability of Yosemite for "public purposes" (i.e. mining and agriculture) by Senator John Conness of California in proposing his 1864 bill to Congress. At Yosemite, as at Yellowstone, the ideology of the sublime fortified the imperatives of scenic preservation. In grafting their vision of crags, precipices and cataracts onto environmental concerns, if only through the related processes of denial

and erasure of utility, artists were highly effective in persuading legislators to preserve scenery.²³²

From the initial stirrings, the idea of preservation entered into an entangling alliance with aesthetics and self-interest; the not-so-strange bedfellows, Art and Mammon, conspired in the formation of the early land ethic. As early as 1832 the painter George Catlin, an early proponent of the National Park idea, pleaded for “some great protecting policy of government” that

preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park . . . the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse . . . amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes . . . A nation’s Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty.²³³

A graphic description of one of his own paintings, Catlin’s advocacy is difficult to separate from his own practices of commodifying Indians in images and in ritualized performance of Wild West shows. In any event, Catlin’s radical concept of a buffalo-grasslands with roving Indians on horseback—an image best represented by his own paintings—was ultimately rejected in favor of monumental scenery. Landscape, rather than man in the landscape, was the triumphalist vision bodied forth in Yosemite and Yellowstone.

In his careful study of nineteenth century American tourism, John Sears has traced the trajectory of the emergent environmental movement from Niagara Falls in the 1820s to the Yellowstone Act of 1872. Exploring the sources of influence in rural cemeteries, landscape gardening, urban parks and the Adirondack northwoods of New York state, he foregrounds the pivotal role of Frederick Law Olmsted in the development of the idea of preservation. To cite but one critical arc of this evolution, *The New York Times*

published in 1864, the year of the creation of Yosemite, an editorial supporting the construction of a railroad into the Adirondacks, claiming that it would transform the region into a “Central Park for the World.”²³⁴ That same year, Northern Pacific publicist Samuel Bowles supported the view that Yosemite’s public ownership should serve as a model for Niagara Falls and the Adirondacks.²³⁵

The historic narrative of conservation takes on added meaning when a short article in the *Woodstock [Vermont] Standard* of June 13, 1887 is brought into alignment with Olmsted’s vision of scenic recreation. In describing the building of new carriage roads in Frederick Billings’ Mount Tom Forest Preserve, the journalist noted:

The new road together with the old give Mr. Billings about five miles in length on his own grounds. They are broad, smooth, graveled, and winding about as they do in the old forest [they] are romantic in the extreme. Still further extensions are in contemplation for next year, including a drive to the summit of Mount Tom. When these are completed the place will be to Woodstock what Central Park is to New York, or Mount Royal to Montreal: for Mr. Billings has always kept the gates wide open for the public to enjoy with him these beautiful drives.²³⁶

Billings’ achieved vision of a quasi-public park is clearly related to Olmsted’s plans for Yosemite which (like Central Park’s circuit road) entailed a circular carriageway which would take in all the best views and allow for leisurely contemplation of the scenery.²³⁷ The concept of a Grand Loop, as first realized at both Yosemite and Yellowstone, originates, according to historian Chris Magoc, in the European “Grand Tour” of the eighteenth century and “subsequent American versions in the East. It offered efficient cultural

edification and a mark of social status.”²³⁸ From this refined perspective, a view of the Windsor County Fairground did not figure in Frederick Billings’ or, for that matter, anyone else’s image of a “park.” As Sears has noted:

Whatever influence Central Park actually had on the establishment of Yosemite as a park, Yosemite combined the functions of Central Park and Niagara Falls as symbols of America’s cultural achievement. As a park it represented the commitment of a republican government to providing, in Olmsted’s words, “reinvigorating recreation” among “the choicest natural scenes in the country,” not just for the wealthy, but for all its citizens.²³⁹

Another link between Billings and Olmsted, apart from their connections to Las Mariposas and Yosemite, is their shared interest in “scientific farming” and the related activities of landscape design and agricultural gardening.²⁴⁰ An important essay by Daniel Joseph Nadenicek has traced the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “organic aesthetic” (as adapted from Coleridge) upon the career of Robert Morris Copeland, the designer of Billings’ domestic landscape.²⁴¹ Copeland, author of an 1859 book on country life, a copy of which Billings owned, laid out the sweeping pastoral vistas of the estate and infused Billings with his Emersonian vision of the indissoluble unity of utility and beauty.²⁴² Copeland, along with Andrew Jackson Downing, was also an influence on Frederick Law Olmsted and his “picturesque” design of many of America’s urban parks.

Paradoxically the nineteenth century’s magically conflated view of “wilderness” as both culture and commodity, poetry and property, stands in marked distinction to many of today’s preservationist attitudes. The compatibility of natural religion and capitalism—in Simon Schama’s memorable

formulation “John Bunyan and Paul Bunyan lashed to the same steed”—was held in dynamic suspension by the philosophers of the Gilded Age. The Transcendentalist vision of nature as a site for cultivated Brahmin-contemplation marched hand in hand with the prospect of “unruly passions” aroused by the aesthetics of the sublime. At other times, the fluidity of these cultural constructs resulted in hybridity as the pastoral commingled incestuously with the sublime. It is not the least of many ironies of the period that the ideals of pastoralism trumped those of sublimity in the official nomenclature for the national “parks,” while the pictorial sublime was more effectively enlisted to persuade government of the desirability of creating such places. Both categories, however, brought the western landscape (as well as the northeastern “wilderness”) into conformity with pictorial conventions as culture annexed nature to the accepted protocols for seeing and knowing.

Albert Bierstadt and the Victorian Imagination

The influence of the paintings of Albert Bierstadt on Victorian perception is especially well documented and affords insight into the period’s diverse habits of viewing the linkages between art and nature. An 1870 article in a Boston newspaper, for example, commented upon the role of one of the artist’s most celebrated canvases in the promotion of landscape tourism:

The landlord of the Glen House, White Mountains, has lately been beset with visitors in search of “The Emerald Pool” in the vicinity of that popular hotel. The notoriety given to that romantic and secluded locality by the exhibition of Bierstadt’s beautiful painting at Childs & Co.’s gallery, has excited the curiosity of White Mountain tourists.²⁴³

This is but one of several known instances in which a painted image imparted celebrity to a topographic site.

After laying claim to a good part of New Hampshire's White Mountains, Bierstadt also mined the American West, having, in the words of one 1869 critic, "copyrighted nearly all the principal mountains."²⁴⁴ A year earlier George Armstrong Custer, a heretofore unacknowledged art critic, had praised western nature's ability to imitate paintings.

We are now in the Wichita Mountains . . . a high level plateau, with streams of clear water, and surrounded by a distant belt of forest trees. Tom [his brother] and I sat on our horses as the view spread before us, worthy the brush of a Church, a Bierstadt, the structure of the mountains reminding one of paintings of the Yosemite Valley, in the blending of colors—somber purple, deep blue, to rich crimson tinged with gold.²⁴⁵

Unable or unwilling to look beyond the surface of representation to the "real world," Custer, like many Victorians, was firmly in the grasp of culture. In his first sighting of the Yosemite, Samuel Bowles' response was also freighted with the memory of the famed artist's paintings. "That which Bierstadt has chosen for his perpetuation on canvas, and which is thus familiar to eastern eyes . . . is oppressive in its majesty, beautiful in form, angelic in its whiteness—the union of all that is great and pure and impressive."²⁴⁶ The art critic Edward Strahan, reviewing the fine arts section of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, contended that Bierstadt's paintings were a quick substitute for travel, pointing out that his epic canvases "seemed to compete in dimensions with the original." The viewer could, in his estimation, "travel on the magical broomstick of one of [Bierstadt's] colossal brushes into the heart of the great West."²⁴⁷

Further obscuring, if not totally collapsing, the boundary between art and nature, the famous Beecher sisters even proposed Bierstadt as a cheap substitute for the view from the porch of a home. "A man building his house takes a plan to an architect," they cautioned.

This plan includes, on the outside a number . . . of "curlywurlies" and "whigmaliries" which make the house neither prettier nor more comfortable and which take up a good deal of money. We would venture to say that we could buy the chromo of Bierstadt's "Sunset in Yosemite Valley" and four others like it for half the sum that we have sometimes seen laid out on a very ugly, narrow, awkward porch on the outside of a house.²⁴⁸

In his 1864 report to Congress on the desirability of preserving Yosemite valley, the nation's leading landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted stated that

it was during one of the darkest hours [of the Civil War] when the paintings of Bierstadt . . . had given to the people of the Atlantic some idea of the sublimity of the Yosemite . . . that consideration was first given to the danger that such scenes might become private property and through false taste, the caprice or requirements of some industrial speculation of their holders, their value to posterity be injured.²⁴⁹

Not everyone, of course, was persuaded of the desirability of substituting a Bierstadt painting for the real thing. The geologist Clarence King, for example, was far from enthusiastic about the popular mania for the great painter's canvases.

It's all Bierstadt and Bierstadt and Bierstadt nowadays! What has he done but twist and skew and distort and discolor and belittle and be-pretty this whole doggonned country. Why, his mountains are too high and too slim; they'd blow over in one of our fall winds. I've herded colts two summers in Yosemite, and honest now, when I stood right up in front of his picture, I didn't know it."

Affirming his allegiance to the central article of faith of the American Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, King remonstrated, "He hasn't what old Ruskin calls for."²⁵⁰ The New York art critic James Jackson Jarves held similar views on the scale of Bierstadt's oversized canvases.

Once seen [Bierstadt's paintings,] the return of the spectator who thinks or has the spiritual faculty, is not worth the cost. Yet they do address significantly the majority of Americans, who associate them with the vulgar ideas of 'big things' as business. In reality, they are bold and effective speculations in art on principles of trade; emotionless and soulless . . . nature's best is left out.²⁵¹

One of Bierstadt's boldest and most effective "speculations in art" was the creation of a fictitious western mountain landscape that he christened *Mount Corcoran* in the hope of selling it to Washington D. C. banker William Wilson Corcoran for his private art gallery. Unaware that the artist had exhibited the painting the previous year at the 1877 exhibition of the National Academy of Design as a generic *Mountain Landscape*, Corcoran purchased the canvas upon Bierstadt's assurance that it had been painted expressly for him with a "loving hand."²⁵² John Wesley Powell, like Clarence King before him, was equally distrustful of the artist's geology. The Corcoran gallery

curator's journal entry for 11 January, 1878 noted: "Maj. Powell thinks Bierstadt's *Mt. Corcoran* not truthful in form of the mountain—too much of a precipice."²⁵³

To some of Bierstadt's patrons the painted image could do more than stand in for reality; it could literally displace it, thereby allowing for the unimpeded exploitation of nature. The Massachusetts paper magnate Zenas Crane, for example, drew a sharp distinction between prophets and profits. At the same time that he owned one of Bierstadt's monumental canvases of California Redwoods, his company was busy converting the actual trees into pulp. In what Simon Schama has described as the "most remarkable case of unembarrassed cultural schizophrenia," Crane saw the redwoods "converted back into greenstuff, courtesy of the U. S. Mint."²⁵⁴

Art and the Adirondack Northwoods

While it is neither feasible nor advisable to draw definitive conclusions about the role of broader art movements in the creation of a nineteenth century landscape ethos, it is possible to cite specific instances in which artists and artworks contributed to environmental action and, on occasion, public policy. One of the earliest and more complex examples of the relationship between landscape art and the emergent nineteenth century environmental movement lies in the formation of the Adirondack Club in the northwoods of New York state in 1858. During the month of August, the landscape painter William James Stillman invited a group of friends from Concord's famed Saturday Club to join him on an excursion to Follansbee Pond, a "lake on a stream that led nowhere," located in the heart of the Adirondack wilderness.²⁵⁵ Among the invited guests were three "magnates," Louis Agassiz, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and James Russell Lowell, major

figures in the Transcendentalist movement. When asked to join the expedition Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, after learning that Emerson was going to take a gun, courteously declined with the cautionary, "Then somebody will be shot."²⁵⁶

Stillman's account of the outing in which the Brahmins hunted, fished, swam and botanized reads more like an essay on the activities of a Boy Scout's summer camp than a serious enterprise in wilderness appreciation. The purpose of the Adirondack Club, as stated by Stillman, was "the recurrence of its members, for a short time each summer, to the undiluted influence of the great mother, Nature."²⁵⁷ Although deer hunting was on the agenda (even Emerson tried his hand unsuccessfully at "jacklighting"), "contemplation" of nature was the preferred activity, causing the guides to dub the gathering "The Philosopher's Camp." The following year, the group formally organized with the purchase of 22,500 acres at remote Ampersand Pond (in the vicinity of Saranac Lake) for \$600. While it is possible to view the Club's purchase of wild land for purposes of retreat and recreation as the first act of the fledgling American environmental movement, this was in actuality a false dawn.²⁵⁸ Camp Maple, as it was named by Lowell, was only occupied for two summers and after the outbreak of

the Civil War reverted to the state for unpaid taxes.²⁵⁹ As Stillman later confessed: "Our paradise was no Eden. The world that played bo-peep with us across the mountains came for us, then the play-spell was over; this summer dream, unique in the record of poesy, melted like a cloud-castle, and Emerson was one of the first to turn back to the sterner uses of time."²⁶⁰ Similar fates of dissolution attended the nation's first hiking clubs at Williams College (1863) and Portland, Maine (1873) before the enduring formation of the Appalachian Mountain Club in 1876 and the Sierra Club in 1892.²⁶¹

In addition to the Adirondack Club, there is evidence to indicate that a slightly earlier group of nature-loving Bostonians called "The Batkin's Club" preceded Stillman and his cohort into the woods. Though it is probable that this group was formed primarily for purposes of hunting, it is difficult to separate that activity, as with the Adirondack Club, from the wider appreciation of the wilderness. A painting in the collection of the Adirondack Museum entitled *A Hunting Party in the Woods/In the Adirondac, N. Y. State* (Fig. 1) is signed and dated 1856 and features at the center of a group composition the figure of the artist, Frédéric Rondel, seated on a stump next to his paintbox, brushes and palette.²⁶² A woodland table, laden with food and wine bottles, awaits the

Fig. 1: Frédéric Rondel, *A Hunting Party in the Woods/In the Adirondac, N.Y. State* (1856), The Adirondack Museum.





Fig. 2: William James Stillman, *The Philosopher's Camp in the Adirondacks* (1858), Concord Free Public Library.

campers who variously play cards, examine rifles and fishing gear, or tend fires. Bringing the wilderness into consciousness, the Paris-born Rondel, the only figure engaged in thought rather than a physical activity, depicts himself in the pose of a painter before his easel. An act of self-glorification, in which the artist pictures himself as both creator and *genius loci*, the painting is strongly inflected by Parisian ideals concerning the primacy of art over life.²⁶³ The canvas was exhibited at New York's National Academy of Design in 1857 where it would have been seen by Stillman, who modeled his own group portrait *The Philosopher's Camp in the Adirondacks* (Fig. 2) (1858) after that of the Frenchman.²⁶⁴ With a characteristic shift of emphasis, however, Stillman displaces the centrality of the artist's persona with the upright figure of his hero, Emerson, who mediates between Agassiz at the left (dissecting a trout) and Lowell's party at the right (engaged in target practice with a rifle). "Emerson, recognizing himself as neither a marksman nor a scientist," Stillman observed in his description of the work, "choosing a position between the two groups, pilgrim-staff in hand, watches the marksmen, with a slight preference as between the two groups."²⁶⁵ Fully committed to neither the active nor the contemplative life, Emerson occupies the Transcendental axis between ideas and facts, serving as a figurative embodiment of the sovereign principle of

"sight." Substituting the philosopher for the artist as the demiurge of nature, Stillman marginalizes himself among the marksmen. In a magazine article written nearly forty years later, Stillman reminisced about the camp and the presence of Emerson, his "evangelist" and the one camper "whose genius was fittest to the temple in which we all worshipped, its high priest and oracle."²⁶⁶ While Emerson carefully insisted that art "must be a complement to nature, strictly subsidiary" ("gymnastics for the eye"), he also attributed to art the capacity to generate the "new eyes" requisite to the righteous perception of nature. "Go out to walk with a painter and you shall see for the first time," he advised, if you would become yourself a "transparent eyeball."²⁶⁷

In his role as high priest and oracle of the Club, Emerson composed an unsurpassedly mediocre poem on their adventures in the wilderness. Entitled *The Adirondacs: A Journal Dedicated to my Fellow-Travelers in August, 1858*, the poem narrates the voyage into the primeval forest of "ten men, ten guides, our company all told."²⁶⁸ The members of the Saturday Club may be the "lords of the realm," but the guides are nature's noblemen and the clubmen must "bow to the stalwart churls in overalls: / They are the doctors of the wilderness, / And we the low-prized laymen." Above the woodsmen stands, however, our "'Gallant Artist,' / Stillman, our guides' guide, and

Commodore / Crusoe, Crusader, Pius Aeneas." In a later journal entry, Emerson noted that Stillman was his universal man. "He could hunt and fish and rule and row / and out-shoot each in his own bow / and paint and plan and execute, / till each blossom became fruit."²⁶⁹ Self-effacingly, Stillman later designated himself as "the insect preserved in the amber of the poet's verse."²⁷⁰

Registering a formulaic wilderness complaint, Emerson noted that the bed and fare were hard but not so much as the black fly and the mosquito who "painted our necks, hands, ankles with red bands." In adversity, however, resides salvation, "For who defends our leafy tabernacle / From bold intrusion of the traveling crowd, — / Who but the midge, mosquito and the fly." Despite the blandishments of the carefree life of the camp, Emerson concluded with a predictable choice for culture over nature: "We praise the guide, we praise the forest life; / But will we sacrifice our dear-bought lore / Of books and art and trained experiment, / Or count the Sioux a match for Agassiz? / O no, not we!"²⁷¹

Emerson's naively hopeful belief in the prophylactic power of black flies to deter tourists was totally demolished by the publication in 1869 of one of the most influential American guidebooks ever written. William H. H. Murray's *Adventures in the Wilderness: or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks* launched a rush of "Murray's Fools" to the region that made the Forty-Niners and Pike's Peakers appear orderly by comparison.²⁷² Outfitted with an over-the-head net so that he "could laugh defiance at the mosquitoes and gnats," "Adirondack Murray," a Congregational minister of Boston's fashionable Park Street Church, authored a catechism for visiting the region, invoking the customary theological and health arguments, while offering the enticement of catching three trout simultaneously on a single hook. In his guidebook the Reverend Murray also

provided practical suggestions for both male and female tourists on methods of travel, proper attire and sporting equipment. Most important was his advocacy of what was defined as "muscular Christianity," the practice of which entailed both spiritual and physical exertion in the wilderness.²⁷³ Vigorous physical exercise, Murray advised, was the best antidote to moral weakness: "the creative skill and benevolence of God are brought about by . . . an exhibition of physical power." Shifting the ideal of Christianity from the practice of self-denial and ascetic spirituality to manly participation in God's great out-of-doors, Murray was a major voice in the sacralization of the natural world. Subsequent defenders of the spiritual and therapeutic benefits of the wilderness, from Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir to Edward Abbey and David Brower, have consistently invoked the ideals, if not always the theology, of the Reverend Murray as a means of personal salvation.

Demonized by the press for his "unreliable" reports, "Liar Murray" had the paradoxical effect of popularizing the Adirondacks as a "Central Park for the World" and simultaneously fostering its allure as an aristocratic hunting preserve for wealthy New Yorkers. The foundation in 1877 of the Bisby Club, later to become the prestigious Adirondack League Club, was formed, as John Reiger has demonstrated, to combat the egregious overfishing and overhunting required by hotels to feed "Murray's Fools."²⁷⁴ Moreover, as Philip Terrie has suggested in his study of the Adirondack Park, the rift between lower-class tourists and wealthy sportsmen masked the real threat to the region, which was large-scale logging (the existence of which, ironically, Murray had denied).²⁷⁵

As early as 1864 with the publication of *Man and Nature*, the arch-pragmatist George Perkins Marsh had written in defense of the formation of an Adirondack forest preserve on primarily aesthetic grounds. Invoking

the standard claim that it was land unsuitable for agricultural uses, he argued, "It has been often proposed that the State should declare the remaining forest the inalienable property of the commonwealth, but I believe the motive of the suggestion has originated rather in poetical than in economical views of the subject." The forest should remain in a "primitive condition," he advocated, "at once a museum for the instruction of the student, a garden for the recreation of the lover of nature, and an asylum" where tree and animal "may dwell and perpetuate their kind, in the enjoyment of such imperfect protection as the laws of a people jealous of restraint can afford them."²⁷⁶ Marsh's visionary "poetical" museum *cum* garden-asylum, however, was not established for another thirty years and, as the subsequent history of the Adirondack Park affirms, mostly in a state of "imperfect protection."

When William Stillman revisited Follansbee Pond in 1893 to recollect his memories of the "Philosopher's Camp," he found the forest in "ashes and ruins" and "the Procession of the Pines" had gone forever. The following year, a consortium of sportsmen's clubs, environmentalists, and utilitarians who were worried, among other things, about New York City's watershed, persuaded the state to enact legislation to create the Adirondack State Park "for the higher uses of the great wilderness." As Roderick Nash has pointed out, "the rationale for wilderness preservation was gradually catching up with the ideology of appreciation."²⁷⁷ Over a century later, however, it is still routine for environmental organizations like the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society and the Natural Resources Defense Council to resort to utilitarian arguments to mask their actual intention, which, more often than not, is preservation of scenic beauty for its own sake.²⁷⁸

Art and the White Mountains: The Invention of Scenery

When the Boston Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King published his magisterial guidebook to the White Mountains of New Hampshire in 1859, the region was well on its way to becoming the foremost site for landscape tourism in America.²⁷⁹ First brought into national prominence in the later 1820s by the paintings of Thomas Cole, the White Mountains became, as a consequence, the "wilderness" most accessible to the great urban centers of Boston and New York for purposes of cultural exploitation.²⁸⁰ Here, as later in Yosemite and the Yellowstone, public perception of nature was first shaped by imported European aesthetics adapted to American realities. Alternately picturesque, then sublime, and once more picturesque, the region was persistently over time made to conform to aesthetic theory.²⁸¹

A remarkable case study of the operations of culture upon nature, and specifically the impact of a famous landscape painting upon a given topographic site, is provided by the "discovery" of the Intervale at North Conway by painters Benjamin Champney and John Frederick Kensett in June of 1850. Recently returned from study in Europe, they happened upon the Mount Washington valley and proclaimed it to be the most beautiful place on earth, "even more picturesque than the Alps."²⁸² Expressing a characteristic lability of aesthetic categories, Champney stated in his memoirs, "We had seen grander, higher mounts in Switzerland, but not often so much beauty and artistic picturesqueness brought together in one valley."²⁸³ All that summer Kensett made sketches for a large panoramic canvas that was completed in his New York studio during the winter of 1851. When it was exhibited at New York's National Academy, *The White Mountains—Mount Washington* was at once acknowledged as the signature image of the

region. Purchased by the American Art Union for engraving and distribution (Fig. 3) to its over thirteen thousand members, the painting was reconfigured by Currier and Ives for a colored lithograph and received the widest possible dissemination for a work of art during the period. By the middle of the nineteenth century, *The White Mountains—Mount Washington* was the best known and most revered landscape image in America, hanging on the walls of thousands of homes. A New England scene with grand, national associations, it offered assurances to Americans that God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. Moreover the composition of the painting established a new model for the representation of the American landscape. In lieu of Cole's paradigmatic vision of the White Mountains as primal wilderness, the view embraced by Stillwell and Emerson for the Adirondacks, Kensett employed a binary landscape formula in which a cultivated foreground and middle distance gradually yields to distant mountain sublimity. In conjoining the works of man and nature in harmonious unity, Kensett intimated that there was room for both poetry and property, thus envisaging a "middle landscape." The mediating "landscape of reconciliation," according to historian Leo Marx, became the dominant model of American nature after mid-century.²⁸⁴

Writing in the art journal *The Crayon*, which he both founded and co-edited, William Stillwell recognized the cultural differences between his beloved Adirondacks and the White Mountains. "To those who find their recreation in hunting or fishing," he wrote, the Adirondacks are "inviting in the extreme." For artistic purposes, however, "there is little in this district to compare with the White Mountain views. . . . There is no Alpine sublimity, few precipices or bold elevations, but the roll of unbroken green . . . the peaks heaving up one after the other, as near alike as may be without being alike."²⁸⁵

In his memoirs, composed half a century after the public unveiling of Kensett's famous canvas, Champney wrote: "Thus the fine picture became widely known and interested artists and others in our mountain scenery. So much so that the next season many artists followed in our wake bringing friends and lovers of mountain scenery with them."²⁸⁶ In this process the "Switzerland of America" was transformed into the "American Barbizon" as North Conway became the nation's first artists' colony with "dozens of umbrellas dotted about under which sat artists from all sections of the country."²⁸⁷ Writing in 1856, the painter Thomas Addison Richards commented presciently upon the role of art in stimulating

Fig. 3: James David Smillie after John Frederick Kensett, *Mount Washington from Sunset Hill, North Conway* (1851), Private Collection.



tourism: "Conway valley is a delightful place for artistic study, and for summer residences; and within a few years past, it has been a favorite resort of American landscapists, and has grown to be a veritable 'watering place' in the great number of tourists who not only pass, but linger within its borders."²⁸⁸

The publication in 1859 of Thomas Starr King's highly prescriptive guidebook gave clerical imprimatur to the White Mountain landscape. In this text, in which he consciously compares a visit to the mountains with a visit to an art gallery, he directs the reader where to go, where to stand, what to see, and what to think. Establishing the proper "perspective" from which to view the mountains, he taught his public how to read moral allegories into the landscape and how to translate that into cultural practice. "The effect of White Mountain journeys," he instructed, "should be seen in our homes, in a purer delight in art, and an intelligent patronage of it."²⁸⁹ The proper reverential attitude towards nature will lead, in his Ruskinian view, to a corollary love of art, and thus the land will be "lifted into landscape." This miraculous transubstantiation is attained, however, only by the perceiving eye of an informed viewer, the eye being "the chief physical sign of the royalty of man on the globe."²⁹⁰ At the heart of Starr King's landscape liturgy lies the Intervale at North Conway which he canonized as "a natural lesson in landscape composition, a little quotation from Arcadia."²⁹¹ Prefacing his guidebook with Ruskin's claim that "the best image which the world can give of Paradise is the slope of the meadows . . . on the sides of a great Alp," he urged pilgrims not to

spend their time and money . . . in the study of the gastronomy of Coos County in New Hampshire, or to criticize the comparative upholstery of the largest houses, but to be introduced to the richest feasts of loveliness and grandeur

. . . and to be refreshed by the draperies of verdure, shadow, cloud, and color, that are hung by the Creator around and above the hills.²⁹²

Starr King was not alone in his tendency to blur the mutable boundaries between art, artifice and nature. Benjamin Willey—a descendent of the ill-starred family that perished in the fabled 1826 landslide, which fed a generation of Romantics on White Mountain "gloom and doom"—rendered a similar judgment. "One who visits the Conway meadows sees the original of half the pictures that have been shown in our art rooms the last two years. All our landscape painters must try their hand at this perfect gem of New England scenery."²⁹³ A few years later, the inveterate traveler Bayard Taylor was more specific about which landforms imitated which artists:

We had entered artist-land, and even when the forests narrowed our prospect, we only saw the picturesque. . . . Much of the [White Mountain] landscape consists of remembrances of New York studios. Every foreground was made up of sketches by Shattuck, Coleman and the younger painters; every background was a complete picture by Kensett.²⁹⁴

In his excited imagination, Luminist horizons were yielding to Barbizon-inspired foregrounds.²⁹⁵ Further transforming nature into art, he dilated on the prospect of Mount Chocorua from the Intervale: "I watched the shifting quadruple peaks of Chocorua with a peculiar personal interest. Gradually they assumed the familiar position. . . . yes, there is my Chocorua! And really, at this distance, he towers not more grandly in the afternoon light than on those four feet of canvas, in my room at home, 'where it is always afternoon.'²⁹⁶ Indeed, so durable was the belief in the shaping influence of culture upon nature that, even during the last decade

of the nineteenth century, the Reverend Julius Ward could assure his readers that his guidebook to the White Mountains was “written in illustration of the modern interpretation of Nature which has been taught us by Emerson and Wordsworth and Ruskin.” Such understanding, he averred, expresses “the enrichment that exists between the mountains and ourselves, when they are approached through the sympathetic imagination of what is transcendental in poetry and art. All of our poets and students of nature are under the spell of this enthusiasm.”²⁹⁷

The nineteenth century’s attraction to the White Mountains, and to the Intervale at North Conway in particular, produced near fatal consequences, for without the protection of federal or state legislation the “little quotation from Arcadia” was transformed over time into a commercial inferno. The vantage from which Kensett made his sketches of the Intervale is today occupied by a sprawling motel with a nearby alpine slide, while the once pastoral middle distance is framed by an array of commercial outlets ranging from Ralph Lauren to Donna Karan. The tourists who formerly arrived to contemplate the beauties of the landscape from the piazzas of grand hotels (now destroyed) presently arrive in droves to shop at Dansk and Eddie Bauer. Where once the fashionable were driven in carriages to view the legendary scenery near Artists’ Brook and Champney Falls, or to gaze upon the Cathedral Ledges from Artists’ Bluff, tourists now spend upwards of an hour in snarling traffic jams in order to traverse the village of North Conway. In the final reckoning, the nineteenth century’s commodification of regional tourism by the canvases and books of Kensett, Champney and Starr King cannot be disassociated from the present commercial disfiguration of the region—though few, if any, who visit North Conway today have ever heard of these members of the Victorian cultural elite. Likewise the diverse practices

of Olmsted, Bierstadt, Starr King and Watkins cannot be divorced from the contemporary problems that beset Yosemite. For better and worse, it is precisely because Yosemite and the Intervale conformed so fully to the aesthetic mandates of the picturesque and the sublime, that one was “preserved” and the other “lost”; though in high season, it was difficult to determine (until recently) which place featured the greater automotive gridlock.

In 1860, the Reverend Thomas Starr King, in a dramatic reversal, switched his authorial allegiances from the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the Sierras of California. After viewing the Yosemite from Inspiration Point, he wrote to a friend, “Poor White Mountain Notch,” referring to the region’s most famous anthropomorphic symbol, The Old Man of the Mountains, “its nose is broken.” “If you can find any copies of King’s book on the New Hampshire ant-hills,” he implored, “I advise you, as a friend to the author, to buy up the remaining edition and make a bonfire in the park.”²⁹⁸ Though impossible to calibrate precisely, the mountain minister’s dismissive remarks on the Great Stone Face and the implied migration of divinity to the American West were both consequential and catastrophic.

The Art of Protest

If landscape art and nature writing could be enlisted to “preserve” scenery (Yosemite and Yellowstone) or, inadvertently, to “destroy” it (North Conway), they could also be employed to protest depredations against nature. In this project, painting was often less instrumental than letters. For many of the reasons that have been adduced, representation of the American landscape was celebratory, the reduplication of the work of the “visible hand of God” being the ordained work of painters. At the outbreak of the Civil War, however, photographers turned their attention to documenting the



Fig. 4: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Twilight on Hunter Mountain* (1866), Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago.

unpalatable processes of the destruction of both humans and nature, inflecting for the moment the painter's vision of American experience.

Matthew Brady's photographs of Civil War battlefields, for example, had a discernible influence upon the art of painting in the instance of Sanford Robinson Gifford's 1866 painting *Twilight on Hunter Mountain* (Fig. 4). This stark and depressing image of ruin is a meditation upon the nation's fall from Innocence and constitutes one of the most disturbing works of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁹ In the midst of a clearing, whose field of stumps bear a resemblance to fallen soldiers, a diminutive figure, his back turned to the spectator, gazes westward towards a distant mountain and a setting sun. A modest homestead stands nearby, located within a shallow depression that replicates in reverse the shape of the mountain. Deliberately manipulating the visual metaphors of harvest, death and ruin, Gifford depicts a natural paradise despoiled by man and history. For perhaps the first time in American art, the field of tree stumps cannot be understood to denote progress, and a mood of desecration is felt.³⁰⁰

Like most important landscape paintings of the era, Gifford's work was intended for a stratified audience and intended to be read on both a literal and a symbolic level. Since the location of the scene is near the village of Catskill, Gifford intended to reference for an informed viewer the rural studio of

Thomas Cole, the father of the American landscape tradition and the painter who first protested "the ravages of the axe." On another level, Catskill was the center of the region's leather-tanning industry. Gifford, the grandson of a tanner, knew that the area's great stands of hemlock had been drastically reduced for the tannin in the bark. A painful reminder of the loss of the once virgin forest, a solitary giant hemlock at the center of the composition stands guardian over the field of stumps. Purchased, and possibly commissioned, by the New York merchant James Pinchot, a close friend of the artist, *Twilight on Hunter Mountain* passed into the collection of America's leading forestry family. James Pinchot, "the Father of American Forestry," served as vice president of the American Forestry Association, founded in 1875, and named his eldest son after the artist. Gifford Pinchot, in turn, became America's most influential forester and the first Director of the United States Forest Service.

A second painting by Gifford, entitled *Scribner's Field, Catskills* (Fig. 5), also discourses with ideas of life, death and the desecration of nature. A solitary figure, accompanied by a dog, advances towards the spectator through a field punctuated by ravaged, man-made stumps. No vista of a distant mountain provides visual escape from this strikingly morbid scene of desolation. Painted at the height of the Civil War by an artist who had served at the battlefield with



Fig. 5: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Scribner's Pasture* (c. 1860), The Dayton Art Institute.

New York's Seventh Regiment, the canvas is almost certainly a pictorial rumination upon the consequences of human conflict. It is also a reflection upon the price of progress. Silas Scribner ran a boarding house located near the top of the famed Kaaterskill Falls, site of the tales of Washington Irving and several early canvases by Thomas Cole. Gifford, together with several other Hudson River artists, often frequented Scribner's boarding house due to its proximity to South Lake and the famous overlook from Kaaterskill Clove.³⁰¹ Scribner also ran a sawmill and created a dam on Lake Creek, which flooded South Lake and killed numerous trees. Logs taken from Scribner's field were used to build the luxurious Catskill Mountain House and to construct an

observation platform over Kaaterskill Falls. It was doubtless these commercial logging activities that Gifford was documenting in his muted canvas of the stumpage and slash deforming Scribner's field. In this abrupt departure from "picturesque" norms for landscape, Gifford was surely once again lamenting "the ravages of the axe."

The difficulty of interpreting nineteenth century art, however, is demonstrated by comparing Gifford's stark painting with contemporaneous images of landscapes punctuated by stumpage. *North Williston, Vermont* (c. 1860) by Charles Lewis Heyde and *Bird Mountain, Castleton, Vermont* (c. 1870) by James Hope (Figs. 6-7) are views by native Vermont painters that celebrate, rather than condemn, the practices of logging

Fig. 6: Charles Lewis Heyde, *North Williston, Vermont* (c. 1855-1865), Shelburne Museum of Art.





Fig. 7: James Hope, *Bird Mountain, Castleton, Vermont* (c. 1860), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

to support advanced technology. Both landscapes, featuring conspicuous fields of stumps, are best understood as icons of progress rather than paintings of protest. The stumps are clearly meant to denote the trees felled to fuel the engines of progress. The dialogue, inscribed within these works by Gifford, Heyde and Hope, between natives and cosmopolitans—in this instance New Yorkers and Vermonters—continues to animate discussions over land use in the late twentieth century. Perhaps the ultimate irony documented by this nineteenth century pictorial discourse is that neither of the Vermont railroads is today extant and Scribner's Boarding House was "bulldozed into oblivion, except for a part of its foundations, in order to make room for a parking lot for the New York State Conservation Department."³⁰²

The Mountain of the Holy Cross: The Kingdom of God in America

Another celebrated instance in which Romantic landscape images served to promote the veneration and preservation of scenery lies in the "discovery" and documentation of Colorado's Mountain of the Holy Cross in 1873 by photographer William Henry Jackson. First sighted by journalist Samuel Bowles from the summit of Gray's Peak some forty miles distant, the

Mountain of the Holy Cross was designated as "His sign, His seal, His promise there—a beacon upon the very center and hight [sic] of the Continent to all its people and all its generations."³⁰³ Further claiming that "no Swiss mountain view carries such majestic sweep of distance, such sublime combination of hight [sic], breadth and depth; such uplifting into the presence of God," he compared the scenery to the "three or four great natural wonders of the world—with Niagara Falls from the Tower, with the Yosemite Valley from Inspiration Point."³⁰⁴ Attracted by Bowles' account, Ferdinand Vandiveer Hayden undertook his seventh U.S. Geological Survey to the Colorado Rockies in the company of Jackson and others with the purpose, among other things, of finding the mysterious and elusive mountain. Jackson's narrative of the search for the "Cross of Snow" constitutes one of the great artistic adventure stories of the American West, together with those of Catlin, Bodmer and Alfred Jacob Miller.³⁰⁵ Burdened with over one hundred pounds of photographic equipment, Jackson and his companions were obliged to climb to over 13,000 feet on neighboring Notch Mountain in order to gain an unimpeded view of the fabled cross. The resultant glass plate photograph, when published in the fall of 1873, galvanized the public imagination, resulting in a social and cultural impact

comparable to the view of the earth from the moon in recent times. Arguably the most important photograph of the nineteenth century, Jackson's image stimulated enormous interest in the Rocky Mountain West; God had left his signature in the landscape and it was in the heart of the Continent.

In this charged atmosphere William Gilpin, former governor of the Colorado Territory, published *Mission of the North American People*, a text which located the "zodiac of nations" along the fortieth degree of latitude and situated Denver and the Rocky Mountains as the "focal point of impregnable power in the topographical configuration of the continent."³⁰⁶ Attracted by Jackson's photograph and Gilpin's rhetoric, painter Thomas Moran joined the Hayden survey of 1874 in order to visit the site with a view to a monumental painting that would be ready for exhibit in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial art exhibition. The resultant 8' x 6' canvas, together with Jackson's legendary photograph, were exhibited together in Philadelphia, creating a cultural aura for the mountain and promoting political statehood for Colorado. Moran's painting, unlike Jackson's photograph, is composed from a lower elevation, the spectator separated from the distant, lofty mountain by a stream and waterfall. Intended to symbolize holy water emerging from the cross, the stream also denotes, in the insightful analysis of Linda Hults, the idea of pilgrim's progress in the American West.³⁰⁷ Contemporaneous art critics readily understood Moran's iconography of suffering and redemption, passion and pilgrimage, even recognizing in the snowdrift to the right of the cross "a prone figure with hands outstretched and imploring to the symbol of salvation."³⁰⁸ Transfigured by the brush of Moran from a geological formation into a devotional image, *Mountain of the Holy Cross* inspired scores of pilgrims and invalids to seek miraculous cures from the waters of the sacred mountain.

Reviewing the Centennial exhibition at which *Mountain of the Holy Cross* was a major attraction, the Reverend Philip Sandhurst observed that it

teaches that Christian nations keep in the front rank in the progressive march of mankind. . . .Should we not be thankful that Art has exercised her highest powers in the endeavor to place the Saviour and His passion properly before us?. . . Why should not He speak to us from the glowering canvases and breathing marble as well as from the domains of nature and revelation?³⁰⁹

The icon of the Cross of Snow continued to resonate throughout the later nineteenth century and into the early decades of the present one. In 1879 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow composed an elegiac poem in memory of his deceased wife based upon the celebrity of the image. It read in part:

There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sundefying, in its deep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the
changing scenes
And season, changeless since the day
she died.³¹⁰

In 1901 Vice President Theodore Roosevelt visited the Cripple Creek gold district of Colorado, viewing in the central octagon of a local mansion a large fresco of the *Mountain of the Holy Cross* out of which poured a cascade of real water into an aquarium filled with mountain trout.³¹¹ Overwhelmed by the spectacle, Roosevelt reportedly exclaimed to the owner, "I say, Maurice [Finn], this is phenomenal. You deserve a Congressional medal for your ingenuity."³¹² The discrete boundary between art and nature, always fluid during

the Romantic period in America, was here sundered in a remarkably operatic display of illusion and reality.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, William Henry Jackson continued to re-circulate the photographic image of the *Mountain of the Holy Cross* as a quasi-religious icon and in 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps recalling his visit to Cripple Creek, established the Holy Cross National Forest.³¹³ In the 1930s, Jackson abandoned photography altogether for painting and began to depict the memory rather than the actuality of the West. Under the aegis of Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, he was commissioned to make oil paintings of scenic vistas in the National Parks, and in 1936 to produce a set of four murals for the Department of the Interior museum. Commemorating the great Federal surveys of the 1870s: Wheeler at Zuni, Powell at Grand Canyon, King in the Sierra Nevada and Hayden at Yellowstone, the murals

depict the "process by which the government presided over the discovery and classification of the national resources and then determined their best use, regulating and watching over the exploitation of nature to guarantee that the best interests of the nation as a whole were being met."³¹⁴ Two paintings of the period, currently in the Scottsbluff National Monument Collection of Jackson memorabilia, represent the artist's recollection of the "discovery" of the Mountain of the Holy Cross. *Holy Cross* (Fig. 8) depicts Jackson's arduous climb of Notch Mountain and the momentary parting of the clouds to reveal the sacred sign. *Photographing the Mountain of the Holy Cross* (Fig. 9) represents the following morning when the skies cleared to reveal the snowy cross and Jackson was able to record the image permanently on a monumental glass plate negative. This act of homage to the artistic self, the painter honoring the photographer, closes the circle of representation, the western landscape



Fig. 8: William Henry Jackson, *Holy Cross* (c. 1930), Scottsbluff National Monument.

Fig. 9: William Henry Jackson, *Photographing the Mountain of the Holy Cross* (c. 1930), Scottsbluff National Monument.



passing from actuality into myth. As Jackson's sympathetic biographer Peter Hales has astutely written:

The living Jackson and the mythic Jackson steadily diverged. . . . The old man was in danger of disappearing into his own image, as his nineteenth-century landscapes of memory and experience disappeared under the impastoed paintings of the new myths, myths reclaiming the West once again as a place of escape—but now an escape into fantasy rather than possibility.³¹⁵

In 1928 the *Denver Post* began to promote annual pilgrimages to Notch Mountain for the faithful to view “the most magnificent and holiest natural shrine in the world.”³¹⁶ The Mount Holy Cross Pilgrim Association lobbied so effectively that on May 11, 1929 President Herbert Hoover signed a proclamation making Mountain of the Holy Cross a National Monument. Reports of the miraculous healing powers derived from the sight of the Snow Cross or from the holy waters of Cross Creek continued until World War II when the monument was declared “off limits” due to the proximity of an army base. In 1950 President Truman signed a bill dissolving the

National Monument, the site reverting to the renamed White River National Forest.³¹⁷ Though the reason offered for the dissolution of the monument was the decline in visitations and the erosion of one of the arms of the Cross, the real motivation is to be found in the modern world's secular view of nature. The ambivalence of the government in involving itself with numinous landscapes was manifested initially by Congress' refusal to purchase Moran's *Mountain of the Holy Cross* (*Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* and *Chasm of the Colorado* had been previously acquired for the Senate building) and by the 1945 renaming of the Holy Cross National Forest as the White River National Forest.

Art and the Landscape of Tourism

One of the most intriguing landscape paintings of the later nineteenth century is William Hahn's *Yosemite Valley from Glacier Point* (Fig. 10). Painted in 1874, Hahn's image of tourists surveying the scenery is one of the earliest to privilege the activities of tourism over the spectacle of nature. Hahn, a native of Germany, had met William Keith in Düsseldorf and was invited to visit the American painter in San Francisco. Trained in the European tradition of figure and animal painting, Hahn immediately applied

his talents to the western landscape. Unlike his countryman Hermann Herzog, who painted a pristine view of the identical site in the same year, Hahn focused upon the human protagonists rather than untenanted nature.³¹⁸ Positioned in the center of the composition is a fashionable couple and their daughter. As the woman scans the view with a pair of binoculars, her husband points out the salient features of the landscape. Converting the site into “sight,” the magnified gaze of the female tourist converts the spectacle of nature into a form of theater. The pleasure of looking (scopophilia) at scenery is elided in this canvas with the socially sanctioned practice of viewing a performance.³¹⁹

Secondary groupings of tourists, perched on the ledge, gaze into space while bored guides, who have seen the view many times, doze in the shade provided by their horses. The presence of a guide carrying a large sack and a bottle of wine indicates that a picnic is about to be served. Emphatically highlighted, a number of discarded bottles and other detritus, located in the left foreground of the canvas, suggests the German born artist’s concern for the continued well-being of the site. While it is

possible to interpret this vignette as a reassurance “to the contemporary viewer that Glacier Point was a frequently visited attraction and one where tourists were provided with the necessary comforts,”³²⁰ it is more likely a condemnation of the careless and wasteful practices of Americans. As such *Yosemite Valley from Glacier Point* may well be the earliest recorded remonstrance against littering. While it is tempting to read this canvas as a secularizing discourse on tourism, geology and pollution—a desacralization of numinous nature—it is known that the central panel was accompanied by pendants (currently in private collections) representing the ascent towards, and the descent from Glacier Point. As originally configured and exhibited, the painting would have appeared as a triptych, a structure associated with Renaissance altarpieces and symbolic of spirituality. Of America’s many “sacred places” Yosemite Valley, in the eyes and mind of the painter, was the most “sacred,” and any pollution of the touristic overlooks was a form of sacrilege.

Almost exactly contemporaneous with Hahn’s painting of the Yosemite are Frank Jay Haynes’ landscape photographs of the Yellowstone. Commissioned by Northern



Fig. 10: William Hahn, *Yosemite Valley from Glacier Point* (1874), California Historical Society.

Pacific's President Frederick Billings through his imaginative agent Charles S. Fee, Haynes' photographs radically transformed the public perception of the Yellowstone National Park.³²¹ Since he was instructed by the Northern Pacific to appeal to potential tourists and to "show up our Country to the best advantage," Haynes set out to counter the sublime imagery of William Henry Jackson and Thomas Moran.³²² Where Jackson and Moran represented fearful abysses and savage wastes, the iconography of inexpedient sublimity, Haynes sought to project the domain of the tourist and to depict "an irresistible genteel sportsmen's paradise."³²³ As official photographer and "superintendent of art" for the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company, the dummy corporation fronting for Billings, Villard and other Northern Pacific officers, Haynes' charge was to reconcile the machine with the garden.³²⁴ His carefully edited photographs of "Wonderland" project a paradise of humanized nature in which phenomenal

forms are subordinated to touristic activities. "Here was a natural environment," writes Peter Hales of Jackson's return to Yellowstone in 1892 and his encounter with rival photographer Haynes, that now "served as an amusement park, a presage of the new wave of public entertainment spaces that would devolve from the Midway at the World's Columbian Exhibition a year later."³²⁵

Abbot Thayer and the Grand Monadnock

Given the many variables—cultural, political and economic—that shaped America's early environmentalism, it is difficult to calibrate the precise influence of any given artist on public policy. Clearly Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran were central figures in creating the cultural definition of nature that eventuated in nineteenth century scenic preservation. The writings of Thomas Starr King and Nathaniel



Fig. 11: Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Mount Monadnock* (1909), Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.

Langford were similarly influential. While the works of less celebrated artists such as Sanford Gifford, William Hahn and William Henry Jackson may also be understood to have had some form of limited impact on the environmental movement, the art and advocacy of turn-of-the-century painter Abbott Handerson Thayer can be linked to direct and enduring preservationist action. Thayer, a dedicated admirer of Emerson, moved his studio from New York to the base of New Hampshire's Mount Monadnock at the beginning of the twentieth century.³²⁶ He began painting the mountain (Fig. 11), which he referred to as "my old shrine," in a body of images that today constitute, along with some ethereal canvases of angelic, bewinged women, his principal artistic legacy. One of his students later wrote about his devotion to the mountain:

Thayer shaped his life and that of his family on Emerson, Audubon and Monadnock. [It] was their totem, their fetish, the object of their adoration. They surrendered themselves to the sorcery of its primitive being. Gerald and his father prowled its peaks and precipices, its naked spine, and knew well the mysteries of the mountain brook and its groves of spruce and hemlock.³²⁷

During the first part of the nineteenth century Monadnock had served as a "Beacon of Freedom" for Daniel Webster and a mystical retreat for Henry David Thoreau, who camped often on its summit. In 1845 Emerson, with his characteristic aversion to "k"s, wrote a long poem entitled *Monadnoc from Afar* in which he described the mountain as

To far eyes, an aerial isle
Unploughed, which finer spirits pile
Which morn and crimson evening paint
For bard, for lover, and for saint

An eyemark and the country's core,
Inspirer, prophet evermore;
Pillar which God aloft had set
So that men might it not forget.

Citing the usual mountain therapies, he enjoins:

Man in these crags a fastness find
To fight pollution of the mind;
In the wide thaw and ooze of wrong,
Adhere like this foundation strong,
The insanity of towns to stem
With simpleness for stratagem.³²⁸

Acting out the mandates of Emerson's poem, Thayer, in whom "the passions for painting and for the world of nature were equally strong . . . and were inseparable from his eminence as an artist," required his family to live winters in an unheated house and to sleep outdoors in all seasons in open lean-tos.³²⁹ His work as an active conservationist began around 1900 when he became incited by the killing of birds whose feathers were being used to trim women's hats (Fig. 12). Realizing that such species as terns and egrets were threatened with extinction, he sought to raise funds from wealthy clients to hire wardens to protect bird colonies in coastal Massachusetts. He eventually succeeded in hiring thirty-four wardens to patrol Newburyport's Plum Island Bird Sanctuary against commercial plume hunters.

After settling in New Hampshire Thayer, in a statement that has a familiar ring, designated the aesthetic "a stern necessity," and defined Monadnock as "an emanation of the Almighty and a money-maker." Unlike Catlin, he did not feel that the disappearance of the object of his affections would increase the value of its reproduction. When, around the turn of the century, his unimpaired view of the mountain was threatened by commercial development, he reacted swiftly to make certain that "no deterioration of its virginity occurred."³³⁰



Fig. 12: "The Cruelties of Fashion—Fine Feathers Make Fine Birds," from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (November 10, 1883).

In an irate letter to the proposed developers, he summoned the full powers of Victorian invective:

It cannot be necessary to tell any grown person that it is in the beginnings that doom or save. The usual luxury loving class has followed to Dublin the worshippers that first came, until all the place's attributes which attracted those first comers—the atmosphere of peasantry amidst primitive nature, etc., one by one gave way, and now our mountain tarn gleams at night with a belt of city lights and roars by day with stinking motors. Your roads—especially a motor road—stab dead the primitive power of a mountain's height to save its realm from vulgar uses. . . . The one meaning of Jesus Christ is that nothing

belongs to any one who cannot make the highest use of it.

Warming to the task, he continued: "You presume to doom all the worshippers who are accustomed to feed their souls by gazing at Monadnock from afar, to know that they are gazing at private and occupied grounds." In anticipation of a strategy used later by David Brower of the Sierra Club against Glen Canyon Dam, he stated: "As rightfully might you write your names across the face of the Birth of Venus or the Sistine Madonna, because you bought it for \$200,000, as you write with your road across the upreared face of that until-now shrine of many pilgrims."³¹

In 1904 Thayer formed the Monadnock Forestry Association, which petitioned the state of New Hampshire to take either by purchase or eminent domain the land on and

around the mountain. Drawing upon the momentum provided by the Federal Weeks Act of 1911, which was in the process of creating the first National Forests east of the Mississippi, Thayer was eventually able to enlist the assistance of the newly formed Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests to block development and ultimately to acquire all of the land rights for preservation of the summit of the mountain. In the words of Barry Faulkner, another painter-devotee of the mountain, "Thayer fought successfully to defend his mountain against commercial vandals and through his efforts much of Monadnock is now a state preserve."³³² "Monadnock is very truly a memorial to Abbot Thayer," wrote Philip Ayres, the first forester for the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.³³³

Today Mount Monadnock is maintained by a consortium of the Society and the New Hampshire State Park Service and, according to rough statistics, is the second most frequently climbed mountain in the world after Japan's Mount Fuji.³³⁴ Unofficially designated by the state as a memorial to Abbott Thayer, Mount Monadnock (upon whose summit the artist's ashes were scattered) is perhaps the clearest example of the transformation of culture into nature. Ironically what seemed to Emerson and Thoreau to be most free of our culture, turned out in the end to be its product.

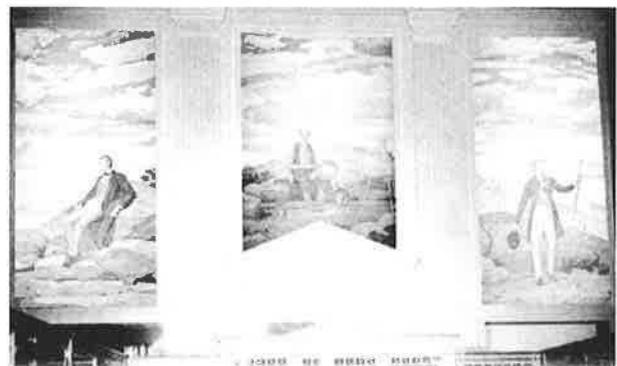
A moving tribute to Thayer and his mountain is Barry Faulkner's monumental mural found today in the lobby of Keene,

New Hampshire's Fleet Bank (Fig. 13). Commissioned in 1950 by the modern Medici of Keene's National Bank (since absorbed into the contemporary armada of Fleet Banks) from Thayer's favorite pupil, the mural and the mountain are inextricably linked to the history of the community and its signature landmark. At the center of the composition is depicted the enthroned Christ-like figure of the painter Abbott Thayer. Flanked by Thoreau, whose mother was born in Keene, in an active pose and Emerson in meditation, *The Men of Monadnock* are celebrated for their creative role in elucidating the meaning of Monadnock for America. Composed so as to project the Emersonian conviction that every artist is a god because he reenacts the creation, the cultural trinity of Emerson, Thayer and Thoreau are positioned as demiurges on the slopes of New England's most beloved *montesacro*.

For Emerson the mountain held an indeterminate mystical allure as evidenced by one of his last poems entitled *Monadnoc From Afar*.

Dark flower of Cheshire garden,
Red evening duly dyes
Thy somber head with rosy hues
To fix far-gazing eyes.
Well the Planter knew how strongly
Works thy form on human thought;
I muse what secret purpose had he
To draw all fancies to this spot.³²⁵

Fig. 13: Barry Faulkner, *Men of Monadnock* (1950), Fleet Bank, Keene, New Hampshire.



Thoreau, for whom the mountain held scientific as well as metaphoric significance, ironically resented the legions of “scenery hounds” he and Emerson had inspired to undertake pilgrimages through their lectures and writings. In a familiar litany, he intoned: “They who simply climb to the peak of Monadnock have seen but little of the mountain. I came not to look off from it, but to look at it.” In a journal entry, he commented on the spiritual meaning of the mountain:

The value of the mountains in the horizon—would that not be a good theme for a lecture? The text for a discourse on real values, and permanent, a sermon on the mount. They are stepping stones to heaven . . . by which to mount when we would commence our pilgrimage to heaven, by which we gradually take our departure from earth from the time when our youthful eyes first rested on them, from this bare actual earth, which has so little of the hue of heaven. They make it easier to die and easier to live.³³⁵

Abbott Thayer, the dominant figure in the composition, is shown seated before his easel—the time-honored pose of the artist-creator in his studio—engaged in bringing the landscape into consciousness through the action of his mind and brush. The easel-born canvas, however, is turned away from the viewer in order to privilege the notional mountain over its representation and nature over culture. In the final analysis, the dialectic is reversed and reconfigured, turned back upon itself, as mural art is accorded primacy over easel painting. Born out of the artistic imagination, the reified mountain landscape unites the poet, scientist and painter in a sacred environmental trinity. Historical anachronism is dissolved in the timeless collusion of mind and spirit, which unifies these figures in their respective acts

of homage to the Grand Monadnock. Loosely modeled after Raphael’s fresco of *Parnassus* (1509-1511) in the Vatican’s *Stanza della Segnatura*, Faulkner’s astringent, sparsely populated mural, like its illustrious Renaissance ancestor, is both conceptually and visually connected to the physical landscape and meant to be understood in relation to it. Mount Monadnock presides over the town of Keene, New Hampshire (its prominent silhouette is discernible from numerous vantages including the upper stories of the bank) much as the *Mons Vaticanus* (one of Rome’s seven hills) was brought by Raphael into visible alignment through a direct window-vista with the master’s depiction of the muses’ and poets’ paradise. Much as Apollo, the central figure in Raphael’s composition, was believed to have left Greece and taken up residence on the *Mons Vaticanus* during the reign of Pope Julius II, the ashes of Abbott Thayer, whose own pose closely approximates that of the Greek deity, were known to have been scattered upon Mount Monadnock.³³⁶ Appropriately enough, the pose for Emerson was derived by Faulkner, a long time fellow of the American Academy at Rome, from Raphael’s figure of the Muse Calliope while the upright figure of Thoreau, pilgrim’s staff in hand, is distantly related to the depiction of the pilgrim-father persona of Emerson in Stillman’s *Philosopher’s Camp* (Fig. 2).

Perhaps Mark Twain, who summered briefly at the foot of Mount Monadnock in 1905, best articulated the meaning of this spare New England Parnassus (and prospectively the meaning of Faulkner’s mural) in a letter to a friend: “The New Hampshire highlands was a good place. . . . Any place that is good for an artist in paint is good for an artist in morals and ink. . . . Paint, literature, science, statesmanship, history, professorship, law, morals—these are all represented here.”³³⁷

**Art And Acadia:
The Last Stand
of Monumentalism**

A recent study of the designation of Acadia National Park in 1919 as the first national park east of the Mississippi, argues that it was the last place preserved primarily on the basis of nineteenth century landscape aesthetics.³³⁸ According to Pamela Belanger, the landscape paintings of Mount Desert Island by Thomas Cole and, most significantly, Frederic Church's panoramic images of the 1860s were responsible for the fame of the island as "one of America's great scenic places." In her analysis of the cultural practices that privileged this coastal refuge, Belanger writes: "The enshrinement of Mount Desert as one of the nation's most exclusive 'sacred places' was, in its initial stages, a product of the cultural work of landscape painters who were also 'enshrined' for their genius in representing the place."³³⁹ Like the national association of Bierstadt with the Yosemite, Moran with Yellowstone, and Thayer with Monadnock, the fame and "genius" of the artist were transmuted magically into the fame and "genius" of the place. Last but not least among America's "sacred places," Acadia National Park was primarily the product of scenic "monumentalism." As with the expansion of Yosemite, the formation of Grand Teton Park and the establishment of Frederick and Julia Billings' Woodstock estate as a National Historical Park, the process also depended upon the philanthropy of a member of the Rockefeller dynasty.³⁴⁰

**From Monumentalism
to Environmentalism:
The Everglades National Park**

According to the great historian of the National Parks Alfred Runte, the shift from "monumentalism" to "environmentalism," otherwise stated as a turn from painting to

biology or from a museum to a sanctuary, occurred during the Congressional debates over the Everglades in the 1930s. "The major preoccupation to be overcome," in his view, "was the belief that scenery must in all cases be defined as landscape."³⁴¹ The author of the 1932 brief on behalf of the Everglades, appropriately enough, was Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (son of the great landscape architect), who admitted that "the quality of the scenery is to the casual observer somewhat confused and monotonous," but hastened to add that the "sheer beauty of the great flocks of birds . . . the thousands upon thousands of ibis and herons flocking in at sunset" affords a spectacle "no less memorable than the impressions derived from the great mountain and canyon parks of the West."³⁴² Among the many obstacles to be overcome was the Romantic association of swamps with sin, death and decay and the belief that lowlands denote "the most base and grovelling affections of the natural mind."³⁴³

Without challenging Runte's ecological perspective, it is also possible to view this transformation of sensibility as one from the spectacles of Bierstadt and Moran to the sensuous Everglade paintings of Martin Johnson Heade and Louis Mignot.³⁴⁴ One of the more prophetic art movements of the later nineteenth century was the "Tropical Renaissance," initiated by painter Frederic Edwin Church, which began to privilege the light, atmosphere and verdancy of southern climes over the phenomenal scenery of the northeastern landscape and the American West.³⁴⁵

The discrete understanding that nature is more often the product, rather than the source of culture, makes it possible to appreciate the discovery of aesthetic value, for example, in the desert Southwest. Without the legitimating vision created by Paul Cézanne—to cite but one vital agent in the shaping of the modern sensibility—it is doubtful that such places as Arches or

Canyonlands National Parks would have fallen under the protection of the Federal government. The ability to find beauty in an arid, rocky landscape, whose structure and coloration is the antithesis of a verdant park, depends to a degree, as nearly certain as it is difficult to calibrate, upon the Frenchman's radically new vision. Once again, it was a cultural figure—in this instance the American art historian John C. Van Dyke—who made the first call for the preservation of landscape of the Desert Southwest. In his radically innovative book *The Desert*, first published in 1901, Van Dyke insisted that “the deserts should never be reclaimed. They are the breathing spaces of the West and should be preserved forever.”³⁴⁶ Citing the extraordinary qualities of light and atmosphere found in the region, Van Dyke, who earlier had edited a book on modern French painting, reinvoked the aesthetic of the sublime for “the great elements” encountered in the “sand wrapped desert.”³⁴⁷ “The great struggle of the modern landscapist,” he wrote as if describing a canvas by Cézanne, “is to get on with the least possible form and to suggest everything by tones of color, shades of light, drifts of air. . . . The landscape that is simplest in form and the finest in color is by all odds the most beautiful.”³⁴⁸ In addition to advocating desert preserves, Van Dyke was among the first Americans to intimate the community of all sentient creatures. “Will the human never learn,” he lamented, “that he is not different from the things that creep?”³⁴⁹ Opening the public's eyes to the possibilities of beauty where it had not previously been perceived, artists and writers, as the “antennae of the race,” have persistently shaped, for better and worse, the nation's ideals of scenery and landscape value. Only in recent years has a serious attack begun to be mounted against the Victorian alliance between art and nature.³⁵⁰

Art Versus Nature: The Politics of Representation and Environmentalism

Against the traditional account of the utility of art needs to be set the environmental musings of anthropologist Paul Shepard, whose polemical writings assert that modern man has been “corrupted by the conventions of nature esthetics.”³⁵¹ In his view, the “retreat from being in nature is the effect of all landscape arts—travel, gardening, landscape painting, nature writing—in which we step back far enough to appreciate the esthetic wholeness of landscape.” The effect of this “esthetic distancing,” Shepard contends, is that “wilderness becomes a series of scenes before which spectators pass as they would the galleries of a museum or a kind of scenery for souvenir photographs that we describe to ourselves in a language invented by art critics.”³⁵² One vital consequence of the abstraction of nature as art, Shepard further argues, “is that masses of people consider . . . art and nature as indulgences of the wealthy . . . and environmental angst as elitist.”³⁵³

Today, anyone visiting one of the great National Parks would be hard pressed to disagree with Shepard or to concur with Albert Camus' claim that “only art has never harmed mankind.” Nineteenth century American landscape painters from Thomas Cole to Frederic Church, for example, were content to turn a blind eye to the sordid realities of Niagara Falls in their rush to exploit the scenic potential of that transcendent icon of the nation's landscape virtue. By any reckoning, their resplendent views of primal nature clearly served as a “rhetorical screen” placed before the harsh actualities of commercial and industrial exploitation. By providing a consoling image that all was right with the world, in depicting the ideal rather than the real, their images became complicit with commercial transgression and industrial depredation. By

way of further irony, it was visiting English clergymen in the 1830s who made the first calls for scenic preservation of the site. "Niagara does not belong to Canada or America," they asserted. Rather "such spots should be deemed the property of civilized mankind."³⁵⁴ It was, however, an artist and an art historian who deserve credit for launching in 1879 the campaign to "save" Niagara Falls. Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect, and Charles Eliot Norton, America's first historian of art and a founding member of the Adirondack Club, joined forces to raise monies under the rubric of "Esthetic Conservation" to lobby the New York State Assembly.³⁵⁵ Their joint efforts were crowned with success in 1885 with the creation of the Niagara Falls Reservation, which in the words of environmental historian Alfred Runte "ranks with Central Park, Yosemite, and Yellowstone as a preservation triumph of the nineteenth-century."³⁵⁶

Along related lines, landscape photography has also been enlisted both for and against the conservation movement. A case in point of the uses and abuses of the medium are William Henry Jackson's photographs of Yellowstone and the Mountain of the Holy Cross, which were invoked on behalf of the enabling legislation. The fact that Jackson's *Mountain of the Holy Cross* was substantially manipulated in the process of development in order to "improve" the right arm of the cross should be considered in relation to a famously retouched photograph of Hetch Hetchy Valley created by engineers for the city of San Francisco. An idyllic lake scene reflecting with mirror-like precision the cliffs and waterfalls above, the confected image of Hetch Hetchy enabled Secretary of the Interior James Garfield to predict that the valley floor, after flooding, would change "from a meadow to a beautiful lake."³⁵⁷ In actuality, the reservoir, as recently documented by the Sierra Club, is "a region

of desolation. Nothing permanent can grow in it."³⁵⁸ Today silt, stumps and stains disfigure the once scenic valley.³⁵⁹ In this regard it is tempting to quote Paul Shepard once again, who claims that "landscape photographs, being surrealistic, empty the subject of intricate context. In time they add layers of temporal distance, leaving a cold crust of esthetics, like growing crystals, making the subjects increasingly abstract, subjecting real events to the drifting, decadent attention of the galleries coterie and connoisseurs."³⁶⁰

To this harsh critique, it is imperative to respond that art, like all human institutions, has capacity for both good and evil. Landscape painting and photography have been enlisted both to preserve and to degrade nature. Perhaps there are better media for conceptualizing the human relationship to nature—film and television spring to mind—but so far none has emerged to rival the enduring consolations offered by the visual arts. Until the operations of culture are better understood, the Victorian vision of the complex nexus between art and nature will continue to shape the geography of the American imagination and the ways in which we know and use the world.³⁶¹

The Billingses' Relationship to the Conservation Movement: Art and Literature

At this juncture it is important to note that almost nowhere do Frederick or Julia Billings give voice in their diaries or elsewhere to the pantheistic Transcendentalism that drove one aspect of the early American environmental movement. Of all his public and private utterances on conservation, only Frederick's malediction with regard to the exploitation of the Yellowstone that "God would not forgive those who destroyed his greatest creations" smacks of the rhetoric of a Starr King or a Muir.³⁶² Frederick's and Julia's life-long spiritual mentor, the

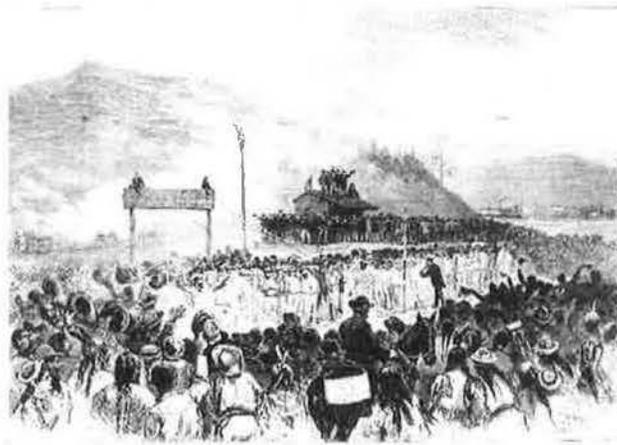


Fig. 14: “The Northern Pacific Jubilee: Driving the Golden Spike,” from *Harper’s Weekly* (September 24, 1883).

Reverend Horace Bushnell, was a strident anti-Transcendentalist who in a moment of weakness once referred to the Mariposa Grove as “the park of the Lord,” but otherwise generally avoided such effusions about the spiritual-in-nature.³⁶³ Rather, Bushnell condemned Emerson for “watching the play of his own reflective egoism,” opting, instead of nature worship, for science and technology as “the certain handmaidens of Christianity.”³⁶⁴ Characteristically a miracle for Bushnell was “no suspension or violation of the laws of nature.” Nature, in his view, sanctioned its wise use, an idea reiterated by a journalist of the *Saint Paul Daily Globe* (Fig. 14) commenting upon the driving of the Last Spike: “The construction of the Northern Pacific was a modern miracle. Unlike ancient miracles, it was performed in compliance with the laws of nature, not against them.”³⁶⁵

In his thoughtful account of Frederick Billings as conservationist, Robin Winks has drawn the broad outlines of his subject’s involvement with the nineteenth century environmental movement.³⁶⁶ Careful to position Frederick squarely within the “wise-use” camp of natural resources (as opposed to the radical minority of strict preservationists), Winks takes the position that Frederick was an enlightened conservationist by the standards of the age. The desire for the Romantic apotheosis, the

quest to reestablish contact with the lost sources of the spiritual, however, was not the driving force of Billings’ environmental activism. Rather, his interests were predominantly pragmatic and ethical.

Along related lines, George Perkins Marsh, purportedly an inspirational force in the development of Frederick Billings’ land ethic, nowhere in *Man and Nature* alludes to the supernatural. To the contrary, in his preface he states that his book is addressed to “the general intelligence of educated, observing and thinking men.” His purpose is “to make practical suggestions [rather] than to indulge in theoretical speculations, properly suited to a different class from that to which those for whom I write belong.”³⁶⁷ Charles Sprague Sargent, editor of *Garden and Forest*, doubtless spoke for both Marsh and Billings when he wrote: “The motive power in this the nineteenth century is money—the love of money or the anticipation of money. Then let us consider tree-planting in its true light . . . the light of money-making.”³⁶⁸

Another of Frederick Billings’ intellectual mentors, James Marsh, president of the University of Vermont, was also assertively anti-Emersonian and, despite his admiration for Coleridge and Ruskin, insisted upon a strict separation of God and nature. In light of this intellectual and spiritual legacy, it is hardly surprising that Frederick and Julia

remained staunch Congregationalists throughout their lives. Attendance at church, respect for biblical revelation and the orthodox ministry—positions that were systematically challenged by Transcendentalists—remained central to their belief system. In short it is unlikely that either Frederick or Julia viewed nature as commensurate with divinity in more than a conventional manner.

Along related lines, Frederick's primary devotion to the farm and Mount Tom—the moral landscape that Robin Winks has persuasively designated his real "monument"—adheres to the utilitarian norms of the age. The "Picturesque" habit of perception, expressed by the essays on landscape in *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, stressed the primacy of culture over nature. According to this theory, raw nature was inferior to cultivation, and the domesticated landscape was subordinate to painting in which the artist could project a more unified view than found in nature. Art, according to this definition, was performative rather than reflective. John Ruskin's radical achievement was to overturn this equation, privileging nature over culture. In his scheme the artist was reduced to a passive receptor and art to "man's lowly imitation of the creative powers of the Almighty."³⁶⁹ In this ongoing debate, Frederick Billings never doubted the primacy of culture over nature.

For him Yosemite, Yellowstone and Mount Tom were sites for the exercise of "wise use" as well as the human imagination.

As well as anything, Frederick's address delivered at the driving of the Last Spike ceremony in September 1883, to commemorate the completion of the Northern Pacific railroad, expressed his fundamental outlook. For more than forty years the corporation "like the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness before reaching the Promised Land," he intoned. "A region of desolation . . . belonged to the wildest of Indians and the North Pole." But now "with magnificent wheat fields, with cattle on a thousand hills, with mines in its mountains and ravines, with an astounding wealth of timber" and a future that will see "prosperous communities, with schools and churches and a high civilization" in which "no more Custers are to be killed," a new route is opened to the "World's Commerce." In concluding, he exhorted the assembled to "praise God from whom all blessings flow."³⁷⁰ If divinity is to be found, it lies, in Frederick's view, in the control of nature rather than in the raw matter of creation.

An illustration in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* for September 22, 1883 (Fig. 15), depicting the driving of the Last Spike, will serve to conclude these observations on the relationship of art to the complex sensibilities of Frederick and Julia Billings. Based on



Fig. 15: "The Completion of the Northern Pacific Railway—Driving the Last Spike at the Point of Junction of the Eastern and Western Sections, Sixty Miles West of Helena, Sept. 8—From a Sketch by Farny," in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (September 22, 1883).

sketches made by Henry Farny, official artist for the "Villard expedition," the composition summarizes the triumphalist vision of progress. At the center of the scene a figure, raising a sledgehammer, is about to strike a blow at the Last Spike. Gathered on either side of the track are dignitaries, including Julia and Frederick, and a group of Crow Indians, assembled for purposes of symbolizing the passage from savagery to civilization. In the immediate foreground an Indian chieftain, reclining upon a wooden platform in the time-honored pose of a classical deity, bears witness to the end of an era.

In the last decade of his life, Frederick Billings returned to Vermont to devote his energies to conservation, forest management and scientific farming. At Woodstock his last years were spent creating an ideal estate, embodying, among other influences, the collective vision of Frederick Law Olmsted, George Perkins Marsh and Romantic landscape painting.

Part II: Endnotes

¹⁴⁶ The reference is to the years 1848–1849 when Stillman first read *Modern Painters*. William J. Stillman, *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1901), Vol. 1, 116.

¹⁴⁷ The definitive study of American Pre-Raphaelitism is Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerds, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1985).

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Hill Everett, "Exhibition of Pictures at the Athenaeum Gallery," *North American Review*, October, 1830, 309.

¹⁴⁹ Stein, *John Ruskin*, 41.

¹⁵⁰ Ferber and Gerds, 15.

¹⁵¹ Rev. Julius H. Ward, *The White Mountains: A Guide to their Interpretation* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890), 4. In his Preface to the text Ward informs the reader that the book "is written in illustration of the modern interpretation of Nature which has been taught us by Emerson and

Wordsworth and Ruskin, and in an attempt to express the enrichment of human life that exists between the mountains and ourselves, when they are approached through the sympathetic imagination."

¹⁵² For an expansive study of Ruskin's influence on Whitehead and the founding of the Woodstock Colony see Alf Evers, *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972), 600–645. Evers' analysis of the operations of culture upon nature is the most exhaustive and sophisticated text written to date on the influence of specific American artists upon the perception and exploitation of specific American sites.

¹⁵³ The Appalachian Mountain Club, the Adirondack Mountain Club and the Sierra Club, to mention only some of the better known environmental organizations, were all founded by Ruskinians. Ruskin himself, in his cantankerous later years, bluntly asserted his nation's influence (by which he meant his personal influence) on Americans: "this dying England taught the Americans all they have of speech, or thought, hitherto. What thoughts they have not learned from England are foolish thoughts; what words they have not learned from England, unseemly words." John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letter 42* (June, 1874), quoted in Marc Simpson, "'A Big Anglo-Saxon Total': American and British Painting, 1670–1890," in *America: The New World in 19th-Century Painting* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1999), 210.

¹⁵⁴ *The New Path* was the title of the journal of the American "Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art."

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959) and Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993).

¹⁵⁶ Shabecoff, 46.

¹⁵⁷ Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1986), 198.

¹⁵⁸ Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ A case in point is the extremely provocative work of John F. Reiger, whose *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press) was first published in 1975. Thoroughly researched and often insightful, it is a classic of reductivist environmental history. Guilty

of the historiographic crime that he set out to demolish, namely “judging the past with the assumptions of the present,” Reiger’s text is driven by the desire to repudiate the modernist critique of hunting by essentializing the achievements of the past. His restricted, partisan view is perhaps best expressed by the untenable assertion: “Regardless of which of the three main areas of early conservation we pick—wildlife, timberlands or national parks—sportsmen led the way.” Pitting manly hunters, who participate in the processes of nature, against effete Romantics who are merely “voyeuristic,” Reiger creates a specious divide that fits more readily twentieth, rather than nineteenth century stereotypes. Despite his otherwise excellent account of the formation of New York’s Adirondack Park, he displays no awareness, for example, of the formative role of the Adirondack Club whose Brahmin membership was composed of scientists (Agassiz), artists (Stillman), philosophers (Emerson) and poets (Lowell). All were successful hunters with the exception of Emerson who tried his hand at “jacklighting” but whose night vision was so poor, he couldn’t locate the target. Blithely unaware of Reiger’s stern distinctions, the Adirondack Club, like most environmental groups, was more concerned with class and social compatibility than avocation. It is perhaps symptomatic of Reiger’s tendency to get things backwards that the cover illustration for his book, a reproduction of A. F. Tait’s mid-century painting *A Good Time Coming* (Adirondack Museum), is reversed. Needless to state, there is no consideration in Reiger’s narrative of the active and strident role of hunting clubs in opposing the addition of Jackson Hole National Monument to Grand Teton National Park in 1950.

¹⁶⁰ Alfred Runte, *Public Lands, Public Heritage: The National Forest Idea* (Cody: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1991).

¹⁶¹ Runte, *Public Lands*, 44–45. A recent example in which the Hudson River School was enlisted to “save” the environment was the 1960s battle over Storm King Mountain and Consolidated Edison’s plans to build a large pumping station on the Hudson. An environmental group called The Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference filed suit against the Federal Power Commission claiming, *inter alia*, that the station would impinge upon the classic view of the Hudson canonized by painters from Cole to Church. This is essentially the view represented in the Billings’ painting *Hudson Highlands—West Point* (1873) by Harry Davis. See Shabecoff, 103 for an account of the Storm King controversy.

¹⁶² Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979), 11–32.

¹⁶³ Runte, *National Parks*, 81.

¹⁶⁴ In this regard we would do well to bear in mind Nancy Anderson’s thoughtful caveat:

Looking at nineteenth-century paintings with twentieth-century eyes carries unavoidable risk, for the modern viewer is privy to history’s judgment which his nineteenth-century counterpart (both artist and viewer) was charting a new course on untrodden land. Thus many nineteenth-century landscape images, whether photographs, drawings, or illustrations, document practices modern viewers would characterize as exploitative, destructive, and appallingly shortsighted. As modern viewers, however, we must set aside our own concerns (particularly environmental concerns) and recall that following the Civil War, when capital and labor were freed from destructive conflict and redirected towards what was viewed as constructive growth, the American West functioned as both an iconic symbol of national identity and a resource to be used in transforming the nation from a wilderness republic into an industrial power (Nancy K. Anderson, “The Kiss of Enterprise”: The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource,” in William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920* [Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991], 239–240).

¹⁶⁵ Ansel Adams, *On Our National Parks* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 113.

¹⁶⁶ See Ernst Gombrich’s seminal essay, “The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape,” in his *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, Phaidon, 1966), 107–118.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher H. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London, Reaktion Books, 1993), 27.

¹⁶⁸ For an excellent account of the picturesque habit of perception see John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), 1–62.

¹⁶⁹ In addition to Ernst Gombrich, the influential landscape historian John Brinckerhoff Jackson has also argued that the taste for natural landscape developed after and from the taste for painted landscapes. See John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “The Meaning of Landscape,” *Kulturgeschichte* 88 (1965), 47–50. Beyond these pioneer essays there has been no systematic study of this cultural-historical process.

- ¹⁷⁰ Founder of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, Bellows was introduced to Billings by Starr King, who described Frederick as “the man I love more than any other in California.” Winks, 131.
- ¹⁷¹ Henry W. Bellows, *In Memory of Thomas Starr King* (San Francisco: F. Eastman, printer, 1864), 37.
- ¹⁷² William H. Jackson, “With Moran in the Yellowstone: A Story of Exploration, Photography and Art,” *Appalachia* 21 (1936), 149.
- ¹⁷³ The French Post-Structuralist thinker Jean Baudrillard argues that twentieth century America is the first “Age of Simulation,” claiming that “signs of the real” are now understood as “the real itself.” Reality, in his formulation, is no longer discernible as such but is stylized and marketed through images which now control behavior in an unmediated, closed manner. Many of his arguments would apply equally to the Victorian age. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (New York: Verso, 1988).
- ¹⁷⁴ Barrell, 1.
- ¹⁷⁵ Donald A. Ringe, *The Pictorial Mode: Space & Time in the Art of Bryant, Irving & Cooper* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1971).
- ¹⁷⁶ Ringe, 1.
- ¹⁷⁷ Louis Legrand Noble, *A Voyage to the Arctic Seas in Search of Icebergs with Church the Artist* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1861), 57. The Oxford English Dictionary credits this text with the first printed use of the noun “overlook.”
- ¹⁷⁸ Hays notes that the term “conservation” was first used in government reports in 1889–1890. While Gifford Pinchot is often cited as “the father of conservation,” a term which he claimed to have derived from the British “conservancies” in India, George Perkins Marsh in the preface to the 1874 edition of *Man and Nature*, xi, refers to the work of the Frenchman Elisée Reclus who has “occupied himself with the conservative and restorative, rather than with the destructive, effects of human industry.” Among John Reiger’s many useful findings (see Reiger, 85) is an 1884 editorial by George Bird Grinnell in *Forest and Stream* in which he urged: “Protection and conservation now, prompt, adequate—this is what the Adirondack forests demand, not restoration years hence, after the damage from unregulated lumbering shall have been wrought and ruin has followed.”
- ¹⁷⁹ Brian W. Dippie, *Catlin and His Contemporaries: The Politics of Patronage* (Lincoln, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990), 330.
- ¹⁸⁰ Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,” in John W. McCoubrey, ed., *American Art 1700–1860: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 37.
- ¹⁸¹ McCoubrey, 102.
- ¹⁸² Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1853), ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), 299.
- ¹⁸³ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 101.
- ¹⁸⁴ Perry Miller, “Nature and the National Ego,” in his *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 205–206.
- ¹⁸⁵ All quotations taken from Frederick Law Olmsted, “The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees” (1865). Reprinted in Roderick Nash, ed., *The American Environment: Readings in the History of Conservation* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976), 19–24.
- ¹⁸⁶ Alfred Runte, *National Parks*, 30.
- ¹⁸⁷ Janice T. Dreisbach, *Direct from Nature: The Oil Sketches of Thomas Hill* (Sacramento, Calif.: Crocker Art Museum, 1997), 17.
- ¹⁸⁸ Nash, *Wilderness*, 111.
- ¹⁸⁹ For Yosemite the best summary of the role of culture in preserving nature is Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990), 5–44; for Yellowstone see Peter B. Hales, *William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1988), 95–140.
- ¹⁹⁰ William H. Jackson, “With Moran,” 157.
- ¹⁹¹ Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957), 105.
- ¹⁹² Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park* (Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Company, 1911), 246.
- ¹⁹³ For an excellent analysis of the problem of language in narrating the “otherness” of the American West, see Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820–1920* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1990).
- ¹⁹⁴ The professional travel writer Bayard Taylor expressed a vested interest in the problem of verbal descriptions of nature. Reflecting upon the view of Niagara Falls he wrote:

As for people saying "it cannot be described," that is folly. It can be described just as much as anything else. But those who endeavor to be sublime are often simply highfalutin: when a man says, "I am overpowered," he is not in a fit state to write; but he who looks calmly upon it, measures its features, analyses the impression which it creates, and writes with the conscientious endeavor to represent what he has seen, can give as good a description of Niagara as he could of a crab-tree in blossom, and a much better one than it would be possible for him to make of the woman whom he loves. I read last Winter, in one of the papers, a most admirable description of the falling of the water, entitled, "Niagara, but Not Described!" The writer knew all the time he was describing it. (Bayard Taylor, *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery and Men* [New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1871], 396)

¹⁹⁵ For Watkins' photographic recreation of a descent into the Yosemite Valley, see Peter E. Palmquist, *Carleton E. Watkins: Photographer of the American West* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1983).

¹⁹⁶ David Robertson provides a provocative account of the photographic project: "Yet here is the central paradox. . . . From the 1860s to the present black and white photography has more convincingly and imaginatively than any other medium transformed Yosemite into art. It has won not only the race for the public's purse, but also the race for the critic's acclaim" (David Robertson, *West of Eden: A History of the Art and Literature of Yosemite* [Yosemite Natural History Association and Wilderness Press, 1984], 53).

¹⁹⁷ Palmquist, 19.

¹⁹⁸ Palmquist, 20.

¹⁹⁹ For representative quotes from Bunnell to Muir see Runte, *Yosemite*, 5, 12, 37. An alternative narrative tradition, comparing Yosemite with gothic cathedrals, is found in Thomas Starr King, Samuel Bowles and Clarence King. For the most impassioned verbal descriptions of Yosemite see Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent: A Record of Travel Across the Plains and in Oregon, with an Examination of the Mormon Principle* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 424-435. Ludlow's excited comparisons of Yosemite with the Garden of Eden and the Heavenly Jerusalem are self-admittedly derived as much from Watkins' and Bierstadt's images as from the place itself.

²⁰⁰ Ludlow, 426.

²⁰¹ Bayard Taylor, 176.

²⁰² Thomas Starr King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras: Yosemite in 1860*, ed. John A. Hussey (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1962), 43.

²⁰³ Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons and the Pacific States, with Speaker Colfax* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1865), 223-224.

²⁰⁴ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London: Dent, 1847), Vol. 4, 432.

²⁰⁵ Nineteenth century English and American writers often used the terms "beautiful," "picturesque" and "sublime" indiscriminately and capriciously. In theory the terms were defined as follows. The Beautiful: cultivated nature reflecting man's civilizing influence; The Picturesque: nature associated with historic man through ruins and other historic signs; The Sublime: wild and uncultivated nature, wilderness.

²⁰⁶ Bowles, *Across the Continent*, 226-227.

²⁰⁷ Bowles, *Across the Continent*, 223.

²⁰⁸ Robertson, 31.

²⁰⁹ A few writers did not succumb to the convention of "indescrivability." In his 1882 guidebook to the Yellowstone, William Wallace Wylie, *Yellowstone National Park, or, The Great American Wonderland* (Kansas City: Ramsey, Millet and Hudson, 1882), title page, asserted, "those who cannot visit the Park will find the Book an excellent substitute."

²¹⁰ See Nathaniel P. Langford, "The Wonders of the Yellowstone," *Scribner's Monthly* 1-2 (May-June, 1871), 1-17.

²¹¹ William H. Truettner, *National Parks and the American Landscape* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 13.

²¹² Langford, 8-9, 12.

²¹³ For Moran's illustrations (the originals of which are in the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma), see Anne R. Morand, *Splendors of the American West: Thomas Moran's Art of the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone* (Birmingham Museum of Art: 1990), figs. 2-3, 23-24.

²¹⁴ Runte, *National Parks*, 40, 45.

²¹⁵ William H. Jackson, "With Moran," 156.

²¹⁶ Chris J. Magoc, *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape, 1870-1903* (Albuquerque: The Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1999), 96.

²¹⁷ See Hales, 312, n. 23 for the relevant documentation of the Yellowstone Act.

²¹⁸ John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: The Century Co., 1894), 3.

²¹⁹ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 49.

²²⁰ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 50. As late as the second decade of the twentieth century Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane, in a nod to Ruskin, instructed National Park Service Director Stephen Mather to consider for park status only landscapes that qualified as "world architecture." Lane's description of Zion was "Yosemite painted in oils." For the famous "Lane Letter," establishing policy for the National Park Service, see Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 57–62.

²²¹ Magoc, 102, argues that the "feigned inexpressibility" of writers confronted with the Yellowstone "was merely a rhetorical device that served invariably as the preamble to a shower of details." "Who can describe the indescribable?" asked Olin D. Wheeler of the Northern Pacific in 1894 before taking up the challenge.

²²² Joni Louise Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 70.

²²³ In pressing Hayden to make a recommendation in his preliminary report on the Yellowstone, the Northern Pacific advocated that "Congress pass a bill reserving the Great Geyser Basin as a public park forever—just as it has reserved the far inferior wonder the Yosemite Valley and big trees." An editorial in the *Boston Herald* for February 4, 1904 invoked both the Adirondacks and the Yellowstone in arguing for the creation of a White Mountain Forest Preserve: "The White Hills are . . . a national pride and treasure, as truly as is the Yellowstone Park, and for purposes of practical and pecuniary national interest their protection is as properly and as urgently a national duty as is the similar treatment of any of our forest preserves" (Paul E. Bruns, *A New Hampshire Everlasting and Unfallen* [Concord, N. H.: Soc. for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, 1969], 4).

²²⁴ As a general rule reading is thought to be a private activity, while painting and sculpture tend towards the public. The exceptions are poetry and photography, which can be both public and private. In his 1870 book *Art Thoughts* (New York: Hurd and Houghton), 306, art critic James Jackson Jarves devoted a paragraph to "The Effect of Competitive Art" in which he outlined the differing financial incentives facing writers and artists. Fear of losing a competitive edge was much greater for artists than

writers, in his judgment. For an interesting account of the impact of Social Darwinism on the American art market, see Saul E. Zalesch, "Competition and Conflict in the New York Art World, 1874–1879," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29 (Summer 1994), 103–120.

²²⁵ According to Alfred Runte, *National Parks*, 210–212, "scenic nationalism," as exhibited in the great parks of the West, was invoked against the formation of such "inferior" eastern preserves as the Great Smokies, Shenandoah and Everglades National Parks.

²²⁶ The only major historian of the National Parks and the National Forests who gives an important role to culture, rather than to greed, envy or fear, is Alfred Runte. In his view, patriotism at the height of the Civil War was decisive in the adoption of the Yosemite bill. The English, presumed supporters of the Confederacy, had denied the possibility of the existence of the "big trees," and their preservation became imperative as well as that of the Valley whose unity was understood to be metaphoric of the nation. Runte, *Yosemite*, 20.

²²⁷ For the "unholy alliance" between preservation and capitalism in Yosemite see John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 130, n. 11 on the role of Israel Ward Raymond of the Central American Steamship Transit Company. Also see Orsi for the role of John Muir and the Southern Pacific in the genesis of Yosemite National Park. For the purported role of the Northern Pacific in promoting Yellowstone National Park see Howard Bossen, "A Tall Tale Retold: The Influence of the Photographs of William Henry Jackson on the Passage of the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872," *Studies in Visual Communication* 8 (Winter, 1982), 98–109. Characteristically Alfred Runte views the alliance between railroads, artists and the national parks as "pragmatic" rather than "unholy," and finds no evidence of dissimulation or malfeasance. In his analysis the Northern Pacific Railroad was a beneficent "catalyst for the national park idea." Alfred Runte, *Trains of Discovery: Western Railroads and the National Parks* (Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1984), 34. National Park Service historian Richard Sellars, in a recent study, takes a more balanced view, claiming that the early twentieth century Park Service principle of "facade management" was based on aesthetic principles, but insists that Yellowstone was primarily the result of Northern Pacific "railroad pressure" to secure a monopoly on scenic tourism. For a highly nuanced account of National Park history see Sellars, 12–13.

²²⁸ Among modern historians of western exploration, William H. Goetzman comes closest to the ideas expressed in this essay. In his great survey *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist*

in *the Winning of the American West* (New York: History Book Club, 1993), 199–200, he states:

It is the thesis of this book that explorers, as they go out into the unknown, are “programmed” by the knowledge, values and objectives of the civilized centers from which they depart. . . . Similarly, in large measure, the artists who accompany them also see what they are trained to see and in the way they are trained to see it. The new sights and subjects offered by the West were represented in terms of the artistic conventions dominant in the civilized culture of the day. . . . The work of the artist in the American West in the nineteenth century was primarily an extension of the vision of Poussin, Claude Lorrain, the Barbizon School. . . . Thus for the cultural historian, things—in this case, paintings and drawings—represent an additional source of evidence for conclusions derived from a study of the written accounts of adventure and discovery in the unknown West.

Goetzmann further recognized that in the visual account of the West, the Sublime replaced the Pastoral. Citing the influence of Ruskin on Clarence King, he failed to recognize, however, that most writers in attempting to describe the National Park remained firmly grounded in Pastoral conventions.

²²⁹ Evers, 584, claims that the designation “park” appeared “frivolous” to upstate and rural citizens of New York.

²³⁰ Athearn, 199.

²³¹ A thoroughly intelligible discussion of the aesthetic of the Picturesque and the Sublime in Anglo-American thought is found in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). For a revisionist approach see Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

²³² Once “preserved” by legislative action, nature as codified by didactic guidebooks was converted into scenery. The Northern Pacific Railroad, for example, given its interest in the Yellowstone, projected a somewhat mixed message in its officially sponsored guidebooks. The 1883 *The Yellowstone National Park* (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Company, 1883), 6, promoted the region as a garden paradise: “The broad and fertile valley of the Yellowstone unfolds as a panorama its charming features of farmstead and of woodclad islands.” The 1884 guidebook, however, views the park as an American Europe, inviting associations with pyramids, Rhine castles and England’s Dover Cliffs. Charles S. Fee, *Alice’s Adventures in the New Wonderland* (Chicago: Poole Brothers, 1884), 10.

For an excellent survey of Yellowstone guidebooks see Raymond W. Rast, “Vistas, Visions, and Visitors: Creating the Myth of Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1915,” *Journal of the West* 37 (April, 1998), 80–89.

²³³ Catlin’s *Letters on North American Indians* excerpted in Nash, 9.

²³⁴ The editorial of 9 August, 1864 reads in part: “Within an easy day’s ride of our great city, as steam teaches us to measure distance is a great tract of country fitted to make a Central Park for the world.” Philip G. Terrie, *Forever Wild: Environmental Aesthetics and the Adirondack Forest Preserve* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1985), 92–93.

²³⁵ Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent*, 231.

²³⁶ For a fuller discussion of the Mount Tom project see H. Eliot Foulds, Katharine Lacy and Lauren G. Meier, *Land Use History for Marsh-Billings National Historical Park* (Boston: National Park Service, 1994), 59–63.

²³⁷ Another factor that should not be discounted in Billings’ largesse is the Victorian doctrine of *noblesse oblige*. If, as Robin Winks maintains (see Winks, 300), Mount Tom (the reference is specifically to the system of carriage roads) was to be Billings’ “monument,” it was therefore conceptualized, like Central Park, as a work of art. In conformity with the practices of such New York City art collectors as John Taylor Johnston and William H. Vanderbilt, who periodically opened their private galleries to the public, Billings was sharing his most prized artistic treasure with the Woodstock community for purposes of instruction and delectation.

²³⁸ Magoc, 220, n. 61.

²³⁹ Sears, 133.

²⁴⁰ For the connections between Olmsted and Billings see Winks, 156–157, 281–282.

²⁴¹ Daniel Joseph Nadenicek, “Civilization by Design: Emerson and Landscape Architecture,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 10 (1996), 33–47.

²⁴² See Sears, 119–121 for an excellent analysis of the Victorian view of parks as urban escape and instruments of social control and reform. For a photographic documentation of the physical desuetude into which many of Olmsted’s parks have currently fallen see Phyllis Lambert, *Viewing Olmsted: Photographs by Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander and Geoffrey James* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997).

- ²⁴¹ Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 189.
- ²⁴⁴ Brian W. Dippie, "The Visual West," in Clyde A. Milner, Carol A. O'Conner and Martha A. Sandweiss, ed., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 689.
- ²⁴⁵ Dippie, "Visual West," 690.
- ²⁴⁶ Samuel Bowles, *Our New West*, 480.
- ²⁴⁷ Edward Strahan, *The Masterpieces of the International Exhibition 1876: The Art Gallery* (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1876), 39.
- ²⁴⁸ Beecher and Stowe, 84–85.
- ²⁴⁹ J. Gray Sweeney, "An 'Indomitable Explorative Enterprise': Inventing National Parks," in Pamela J. Belanger, *Inventing Acadia: Artists and Tourists at Mount Desert* (Hanover: The Univ. Press of New England, 1999), 135.
- ²⁵⁰ Clarence King, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872; reprint, Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970), 210. King's fictive artist, Hank G. Smith, "The Pacific Slope Bonheur" (named after the French painter Rosa Bonheur), is his mouthpiece and alter ego in this amusing account. King, a devoted Ruskinian, always maintained a discrete separation between art and nature. Commenting in the *Overland Monthly* (October, 1870) on another American natural icon, he wrote, "There is no greater proof of the infinite power of Niagara than to gaze upon its glorious front and utterly forget that we have just seen Blondin, in spangled tights, cook an omelette between heaven and earth" (Linda C. Hulst, "Thomas Moran's Shoshone Falls: A Western Niagara," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3:1 [1989], 96).
- ²⁵¹ Jarves, *Art Thoughts*, 299.
- ²⁵² Anderson and Ferber, 55–57.
- ²⁵³ Anderson and Ferber, 56.
- ²⁵⁴ Schama, 207.
- ²⁵⁵ This account of the Adirondack Club is taken from Stillman, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 117–292.
- ²⁵⁶ Stillman, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 240.
- ²⁵⁷ William J. Stillman, "The Philosopher's Camp: Emerson, Agassiz, Lowell and Others in the Adirondacks," *The Century Magazine* 46 (1893), 598.
- ²⁵⁸ It is not clear if the Adirondack Club served as a precedent for the founding of San Francisco's Bohemian Club and their spiritual retreat, Bohemian Grove. Landscape painters William Keith and Thomas Hill were among the founding members of the Bohemian Club, which has never been very "bohemian" nor especially interested in conservation. For the Bohemian Club see William G. Dumhoff, *The Bohemian Grove and Other Retreats: A Study in Ruling Class Cohesiveness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). More recently, Claire Perry, *Pacific Arcadia: Images of California, 1600–1915* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 122–126, has attempted to forge a direct link between the Adirondack Club and the Bohemian Club. Her arguments, while not conclusive, are persuasive.
- ²⁵⁹ The best account of this abortive conservation effort is Paul F. Jamieson, "Emerson in the Adirondacks," *New York History* 39 (July, 1958), 215–237. See also Terrie, 59–64.
- ²⁶⁰ Stillman, "Philosopher's Camp," 605.
- ²⁶¹ See Waterman, 183–198 for the formation of the first outdoor clubs.
- ²⁶² See Patricia C. F. Mandel, *Fair Wilderness: American Paintings in the Collection of the Adirondack Museum* (Blue Mountain Lake, N. Y.: The Adirondack Museum, 1990), 101–102 for a discussion of this enigmatic work.
- ²⁶³ Rondel's unusual work, dated 1856, appears influenced, in certain respects, by Gustave Courbet's infamous *The Painter's Studio* of 1854–55. Unlike Courbet's representation of the act of representation, Rondel's work celebrates the artist as "manly" adventurer, an American trope described by Henry Tuckerman as early as 1866. For Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* see Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1980), 148–189. For "Adventure as an element of American artist-life," see Henry T. Tuckerman, "Albert Bierstadt," *Galaxy* 1 (August 15, 1866), 679.
- ²⁶⁴ For Stillman's painting see Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 65 and fig. 33.
- ²⁶⁵ Stillman, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 280–281.
- ²⁶⁶ Stillman, "Philosopher's Camp," 599.
- ²⁶⁷ For Emerson's "Thoughts on Art," see *The Dial*, 1 (January, 1841), 367–378. On the role of sight as the "noblest of the faculties" see Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography and Industrialization: John Ruskin and the Moral Dimensions of Photography," *Exposure* 21 (1983), 10–14. The influence of Ruskin, the eye-driven "prophet of sight," on American Transcendentalists and other thinkers, is almost impossible to overstate. Emerson, Starr King,

Marsh and Bushnell all give primacy to the role of sight in perception. In one of his rare flights of fancy Marsh (*Man and Nature*, 10) uncharacteristically wrote: "To the natural philosopher, the descriptive poet, the painter, the sculptor and indeed every earnest observer, the power most important to cultivate is that of seeing what is before him. Sight is a faculty, seeing an art." It is important to note that Bushnell and Marsh, both read and admired by Billings, were fervently anti-Transcendentalist. As Marsh (*Christian Examiner* 68 [1862], 57–58) contemptuously observed, "it is a poor Divinity which rests its claims to godhead on the instincts of the beaver or the sagacity of the ant." Bushnell's attack on natural theology is found in his *Nature and the Supernatural* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1872), 505–509. The motto of *Man and Nature* is taken from Bushnell's *Sermon on the Power of an Endless Life*.

²⁶⁸ "The Adirondacs" is published in *Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 159–170.

²⁶⁹ Ida G. Everson, "William J. Stillman, Emerson's 'Gallant Artist,'" *The New England Quarterly* 31 (March, 1958), 36.

²⁷⁰ Stillman, "Philosopher's Camp," 600.

²⁷¹ "The Adirondacs," in *Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 169.

²⁷² William H. H. Murray, *Adventures in the Wilderness: or Camp-Life in the Adirondacks* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869). For an amusing account of the Murray "Rush" see William Chapman White, *Adirondack Country* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 112–117.

²⁷³ For an enlightening account of the origins of the cult of "muscular Christianity" see David Strauss, "Towards a Consumer Culture: 'Adirondack Murray' and the Wilderness Vacation," *American Quarterly* 39 (Summer, 1987), 270–286. The concept was the invention of English clergymen and entered American thought through the writings of the influential Boston minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

²⁷⁴ Reiger, 56–57. According to Reiger, the Blooming Grove Park Association, founded in Pennsylvania in 1871, was the earliest "deer park," modeled on the royal hunting preserve of Fontainebleau. Writing in 1876, "Adirondack" Murray lamented the results of his book on the Adirondacks in an essay in the sportsman's magazine *Rod and Gun*, 9 (October 7, 1876), "The trout are entirely gone, or practically so, and the deer are going as fast as stupid greed can destroy them" (Reiger, 38).

²⁷⁵ Terrie, 92–98.

²⁷⁶ Marsh, *Man and Nature*, 235.

²⁷⁷ Nash, *Wilderness*, 121.

²⁷⁸ The publication in 1960 by the Sierra Club of *This is the American Earth*, with photographs by Ansel Adams and text by Nancy Newhall—the first of the Club's great "coffee-table" books—was surely a watershed in the modern environmental movement's advocacy of preservation of scenic beauty for its own sake. Adams' "visualized" images of the perfect "Place, with a capital P," for all of their technical and compositional brilliance, are products of the most impressive artifice, making him, throughout his reign, the greatest living artist of the nineteenth century. It can be argued that great good and great harm for the environment have resulted from his photographs.

²⁷⁹ Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape and Poetry* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee & Co., 1859). The best studies of the impact of this text on landscape tourism are Sears, 72–86 and Brown, 41–74. Writing as historians, neither of these scholars acknowledges the role of painters in "inventing" the landscape.

²⁸⁰ For the growing body of literature on the role of landscape painting in shaping the perception of the region see Donald D. Keyes et al., *The White Mountains: Place and Perceptions* (Hanover, N. H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1980), especially Robert L. McGrath, "The Real and the Ideal: Popular Images of the White Mountains," 59–70; and Robert L. McGrath and Barbara J. MacAdam, 'A Sweet Foretaste of Heaven': *Artists in the White Mountains, 1830–1890* (Hanover, N. H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1988).

²⁸¹ In her groundbreaking study of nineteenth century American landscape painting Barbara Novak has documented the fluid, mutable and often conflicted boundaries between the picturesque and the sublime. The primitive and the pastoral, according to Novak, often overlapped in the popular consciousness as well as in the art of the landscape painters. See Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 3–17.

²⁸² Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, Mass.: Wallace & Andrews, 1900), 102.

²⁸³ Champney, 103.

²⁸⁴ The seminal study here is Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964).

²⁸⁵ William J. Stillman, "Sketchings," *The Crayon* 2 (December 5, 1855), 360. As if anticipating a change in landscape aesthetic, Stillman qualified his view in what almost amounts to an Impressionist Manifesto:

The advantages to be found here [Adirondacks] by the artist are not of the pictorial kind so much as the impressional. The silence, the dreaminess, and the very want of forcible character in the landscape, have a lulling, harmonizing effect on the mind, and though the first sight is unsatisfactory, and though any particular view may be so, there is something in our memory of the Adirondack country more grand, more poetic, to me than those found in any other country.

²⁸⁶ Champney, 103.

²⁸⁷ Champney, 160.

²⁸⁸ Thomas Addison Richards, "The Summer Life of the Artist," *Art Journal* 18 (1856), 371–372. In her thoughtful study of White Mountain landscape-tourism Barbara MacAdam has demonstrated the incestuous relationship between art production, art journalism and the rise of hotels, railroads and the developing logistics of tourism. See Barbara J. MacAdam, "'A Proper Distance from the Hills': Nineteenth-Century Landscape Painting in North Conway," in McGrath and MacAdam, *A Sweet Foretaste of Heaven*, 21–38.

²⁸⁹ Starr King, *White Hills*, 72.

²⁹⁰ Starr King, *White Hills*, 57.

²⁹¹ Starr King, *White Hills*, 158.

²⁹² Starr King, *White Hills*, 3.

²⁹³ Benjamin G. Willey, *Incidents in White Mountain History* (Boston: Nathaniel Noyes, 1856), 86.

²⁹⁴ Bayard Taylor, 344–345.

²⁹⁵ Aaron Draper Shattuck married Samuel Coleman's (or Colman) sister Marian. Both are associated with the American Barbizon mode while Kensett is generally associated with the older Luminist school of art.

²⁹⁶ Bayard Taylor, 345.

²⁹⁷ Ward, 4.

²⁹⁸ Starr King, *A Vacation*, xviii.

²⁹⁹ Gifford's reference is less to Brady than to his disciple Timothy O'Sullivan, whose *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, July 1863* clearly influenced the

painter at the time. See Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), fig. 209. I wish to thank Janet Houghton for calling my attention to a recent essay by Nancy P. Pittman, "James Wallace Pinchot (1831–1908): One Man's Evolution toward Conservation in the Nineteenth Century," *Yale F&ES Centennial News*, Fall 1999, 4–7. In her stimulating and informative account, Pittman credits art collecting, especially the acquisition of Sanford Gifford's *Twilight at Hunter Mountain*, with shaping the elder Pinchot's emergent conservation ethic. Pittman goes so far as to suggest that Gifford's painting was a morbid reminder of the Pinchot family's early practices of forest clear-cutting in the Delaware Valley. Pittman further intimates, in conformity with one of the central premises of this study, that James Pinchot's observation of French silviculture was a major determinant of his vision of the role of nature in an industrialized society.

³⁰⁰ For the traditional interpretation of the meaning of tree-stumps see Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "The Ravages of the Axe: The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Art Bulletin* 61 (December, 1979), 611–626. These observations were made originally in Robert L. McGrath, "The Tree and the Stump: Hieroglyphics of the Sacred Forest," *Journal of Forestry* 89 (August, 1991), 17–23.

³⁰¹ According to his friend, the painter Worthington Whittredge, it was Gifford who discovered Scribner's:

Many years ago [Gifford] hunted up a little house in Kaaterskill Clove, in which lived a family of plain country folk, and, as the place was secluded and there were no boarders, he liked it and managed to obtain quarters there. This house, scarcely large enough to hold the family, was, nevertheless, for many summers the abiding place of a congregation of artists. The beds were few and it may truly be said that the best were the cheapest, for the most expensive were composed of straw, while the cheapest were of feathers. As may well be imagined the table at this house was not very good. Gifford was no gourmet, but he had a commendable ambition to improve the cooking of the Catskills. To this end, he urged the immigration of some of the wives and sisters of those present, whose culinary gifts he was acquainted with. In due time they appeared upon the scene and, by their adroit direction, new dishes were served and the coffee was improved. But this experiment proved fatal in the end. Boarders came in flocks from the city, and Scribner's Boarding House had to be abandoned by the artists and new quarters found further on

(Kenneth Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820–1895* [Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 1987], 86).

³⁰² Evers, 490.

³⁰³ Samuel Bowles, *The Switzerland of America: A Summer Vacation in the Parks and Mountains of Colorado* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1869), 96.

³⁰⁴ Bowles, *Switzerland*, 95.

³⁰⁵ For a stirring account of the “discovery” of the Cross see Clarence S. Jackson, *Quest of the Snowy Cross* (Denver: Univ. of Denver Press, 1952).

³⁰⁶ Linda C. Hults, “Pilgrim’s Progress in the West: Moran’s The Mountain of the Holy Cross,” *American Art* 5 (Winter/Spring, 1991), 75. This accords roughly with the 1865 *Report on the Northern Pacific Railroad* (Boston: J. H. Eastburn’s Press), 4, which locates the “zodiac of empires” along the 42nd parallel:

the isothermal temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere, along which civilization makes the circuit of the globe. Along this belt . . . we discover the chief centers of intelligence and power, and the greatest intensity of energy and progress. Along this axis . . . civilization has traveled as by an inevitable instinct since the nation’s dawn.

A second pamphlet issued by Jay Cooke on behalf of the Northern Pacific, to which Frederick Billings’ name is prominently affixed, states that the proposed route “abounds in magnificent scenery and . . . if the Road is built . . . it will settle up so rapidly, and the whites will be in such force, that the Indians will be driven out of the Big Horn and Wind River Valleys and mountains which . . . [are] teeming with gold and silver” (*The Northern Pacific Land Grant and the Future Business of the Road* [Philadelphia: Jay Cooke & Co., 1870], 8).

³⁰⁷ Hults, “Pilgrim’s Progress,” 70–85.

³⁰⁸ *Newark Daily Advertiser* (1875), quoted in Nancy K. Anderson, *Thomas Moran* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), 107.

³⁰⁹ Kinsey, 152.

³¹⁰ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1883), Vol. 2, 151.

³¹¹ See Mathias S. Fisch, “Mount of the Holy Cross,” *The American West: Magazine of Western History* 16 (March/April, 1979), 32–58 for a lively account of the twentieth century history of the site.

³¹² Sandra Dallas, *Gaslights and Gingerbread* (Denver, Sage Books, 1965), 149.

³¹³ The McMurtry Manufacturing Company of Denver, Colorado (“Paint and Varnish Makers”) produced countless inexpensive paintings of the Mt. of the Holy Cross (#100) in the early twentieth century by “our special artist A. L. Browning,” claiming that “Our paints are used exclusively in the making of these pictures.”

³¹⁴ Hales, 292 and fig. 190.

³¹⁵ Hales, 297–298.

³¹⁶ Fisch, 58.

³¹⁷ See *Report from the Committee on Public Lands to Accompany HR 7339*, May 8, 1950. United States Congress Serial volume 11380, House Report 2019 and Serial volume 11370, Senate Report 2145.

³¹⁸ For a reproduction of Herzog’s *Mirror Lake, Yosemite* (Birmingham, Alabama Museum of Art, c. 1874–1875) see Nancy Dustin Wall Moure, *California Art: 450 Years of Painting & Other Media* (Los Angeles: Dustin Publications, 1998), fig. 3–7.

³¹⁹ For an interrogation of feminine scopophilia in art see the provocative essay of Griselda Pollock, “The Gaze and the Look: Women with Binoculars—A Question of Difference,” in Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock, ed., *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (London: Pandora Press, 1991), 106–130.

³²⁰ Perry, 130.

³²¹ The best account of Haynes’ promotional activities on behalf of the Northern Pacific is in Magoc, 22–52 and figs. 4–21.

³²² Magoc, 27.

³²³ Magoc, 45.

³²⁴ For the machinations of the Yellowstone Improvement Company see Winks, 288–289.

³²⁵ Hales, 194.

³²⁶ The principal literature is Nelson C. White, *Abbott H. Thayer: Painter and Naturalist* (Hartford: Connecticut Printers, 1951), Ross Anderson, *Abbot Handerson Thayer* (Syracuse: Everson Museum, 1982) and, most recently, Alexander Nemerov, “Vanishing Americans: Abbott Thayer, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Attraction of Camouflage,” *American Art* 11 (Summer, 1997), 51–81.

³²⁷ Barry Faulkner, *Sketches from an Artist’s Life* (Dublin, N. H.: William I. Bauhan, 1973), 23–24.

- ³²⁸ *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Robert E. Spiller (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), Vol. 9, "Monadnock," 58–70.
- ³²⁹ Faulkner, 28.
- ³³⁰ Letter to Mrs. William Amory and Rev. George F. Weld, quoted in Nemerov, 67.
- ³³¹ Letter to Mrs. William Amory and Rev. George F. Weld, quoted in Ross Anderson, 108.
- ³³² Faulkner, 24.
- ³³³ Elliott S. Allison, "Abbott H. Thayer of Monadnock," *New Hampshire Profiles* 24 (1975), 36.
- ³³⁴ Mount Fuji, which has recently succumbed to the road building mania, is fast losing its status to Monadnock.
- ³³⁵ Barbara Ball Buff, "The Dublin Colony," in *A Circle of Friends: Art Colonies of Cornish and Dublin* (Durham, N. H.: Univ. Art Galleries, 1985), 11.
- ³³⁶ For an analysis of Raphael's *Parnassus* and its relationship to the *Mons Vaticanus* see Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 68–69.
- ³³⁷ Buff, 29.
- ³³⁸ Belanger, see especially 109–126.
- ³³⁹ Belanger, 126.
- ³⁴⁰ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. donated substantial properties to the Mount Desert Island Preserve which was designated a National Park by Congress in 1919. Like Frederick Billings at Woodstock, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had designed an extensive network of carriage roads throughout the park. For Rockefeller's many conservation efforts see Nancy Newhall, *A Contribution to the Heritage of Every American: The Conservation Activities of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).
- ³⁴¹ Runte, *National Parks*, 133.
- ³⁴² Runte, *National Parks*, 134.
- ³⁴³ Rev. Abiel Silver, *Lectures on the Symbolic Character of the Sacred Scriptures* (1863), quoted in James Collins Moore, "The Storm and the Harvest: The Image of Nature in Mid-Nineteenth Century American Landscape Painting" (Ph. D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1974), 143. The seminal study here on the symbolism of the swamp is David C. Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 1–19.
- ³⁴⁴ For sunset, bird-filled, Everglade paintings, any one of which accords with Olmsted's rhetoric, see Gary R. Libby, *Celebrating Florida: Works of Art from the Vickers Collection* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1995), figs. 33, 55, 57, 59, 71, 75.
- ³⁴⁵ On this subject see Katherine Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).
- ³⁴⁶ John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 230.
- ³⁴⁷ See Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 232: "In sublimity—the superlative degree of beauty—what land can equal the desert with its wide plains, its grim mountains, and its expanding canopy of sky!" For turn-of-the-century attitudes towards French "modernity" see John C. Van Dyke, *Modern French Masters: The Art Experience in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Century Co., 1896).
- ³⁴⁸ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 56.
- ³⁴⁹ Van Dyke, *The Desert*, 108.
- ³⁵⁰ Professor Van Dyke, it should be acknowledged, struggled persistently to dismantle the Ruskinian equation of art and nature, authoring separate volumes on *Art for Art's Sake* (New York: Charles Sons, 1893) and *Nature for its Own Sake* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).
- ³⁵¹ Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (Washington D. C.: Island Press, 1998), 145.
- ³⁵² Shepard, 138.
- ³⁵³ Shepard, 141.
- ³⁵⁴ Runte, *National Parks*, 6.
- ³⁵⁵ See Kermit Vanderbilt, *Charles Eliot Norton: Apostle of Culture in a Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), 188–190 and Alfred Runte, "How Niagara Falls Was Saved: The Beginnings of Esthetic Conservation in the United States," *The Conservationist* 26 (April-May, 1972), 32–35.
- ³⁵⁶ Runte, *National Parks*, 57.
- ³⁵⁷ The retouched photograph was used in a pamphlet published by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *On the Proposed Use of a Portion of the Hetch Hetchy . . .* (San Francisco: Rincon Publishing Co., 1912). It is reproduced in Holway R. Jones, *John Muir and the Sierra Club: The Battle for Yosemite* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1965), 112.

³⁵⁸ See Holway Jones, 112–113 for a photo essay on the devastating condition of the Hetch Hetchy reservoir.

³⁵⁹ National Park Service historian Richard Sellars argues persuasively that Hetch Hetchy was “doomed” precisely because it was genuine wilderness rather than managed Park Service land. Sellars, 16–17.

³⁶⁰ Shepard, 141.

³⁶¹ This conceit is derived from Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 3–15. In his useful formulation, “geography is the wife of history as space is the wife of time.”

³⁶² Winks, 286.

³⁶³ Winks, 276. The quote reads in full: “That man could cut down such grand creations of the Lord surpasses all contempt.”

³⁶⁴ Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*, 70, 19.

³⁶⁵ *Saint Paul, Minnesota Daily Globe* (September 10, 1883).

³⁶⁶ Winks, 274–311.

³⁶⁷ Marsh, *Man and Nature*, vi.

³⁶⁸ Sherry H. Olson, *The Depletion Myth: A History of Railroad Use of Timber* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), 36.

³⁶⁹ Asher B. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting,” in Spencer, 94.

³⁷⁰ In her diary for 1883 Julia noted that at the close of the ceremony “an Englishman who was a guest of the excursion spoke to me of my husband’s speech and said he was glad there was one speaker who recognized the providence of God in the building of this great Road.” Billings Family Archives, Diary of Julia Billings, 1883, 31.

Selected Works from the Art Collection Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park



Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), *Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite*, o.c., 24" x 18", 1870.

Among the half-dozen most important works in the collection, *Cathedral Rocks* was painted in 1870, seven years after the artist's initial visit to Yosemite Valley. It was probably executed in the artist's studio at Malkasten, his grand estate at Irvington-on-Hudson, and based on sketches made during the seven-week visit to Yosemite in 1863.³⁷¹ 1870 was also the year in which Fitz Hugh Ludlow published *The Heart of the Continent*, a lurid account of his overland travels with Bierstadt to California and Oregon.³⁷² In this text Ludlow informs us how he and Bierstadt had come first to encounter the Yosemite in a manner that replicates Frederick Billings' own experience:

We were going into the vale whose giant domes and battlements had months before thrown their photographic shadow through Watkins's camera across the mysterious wide Continent, causing exclamations of awe at Goupil's window, and ecstasy in Dr. Holmes' study. At Goupil's counter and in Starr King's drawing-room we had gazed on them by the hour. . . . Now we were going to test her reported largess for ourselves.³⁷³

In 1865, following his return from the West, Bierstadt had exhibited a large painting (6' x 8') at the National Academy of Design in New York, entitled *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* (Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama) which astonished Eastern audiences.³⁷⁴ Among the several topographic features included in this panoramic view were the Cathedral Rocks. Subsequently over the next decade Bierstadt narrowed his vision, producing at least three discrete views of the celebrated rock formation.³⁷⁵ Of these the Billingses' painting is the earliest and the only one that is not a winter scene. Employing a dramatic and theatrically focused shaft of light to illuminate the face of the rocks, Bierstadt invoked one of his signature pictorial metaphors of light as divine illumination. Framed by a turbulent sky above and a darkened foreground, the cathedral rocks appear miraculously suspended above the earth. Ludlow, in describing the walls of Yosemite, employed an equivalent verbal rhetoric:

We are at the end of the stupendous series of Yo-Semite effects; eight hundred feet above us, could we climb up there, we should find the silent causes of power . . . climb forever and there is still an Inaccessible. . . . Ye who cannot go to the Highest, lo, the Highest comes down to you.³⁷⁶

Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite is most probably the painting remarked upon by Julia in her diary entry for October 30, 1870, written in Woodstock, "He [FB] brought from N.Y. a fine landscape by Bierstadt."



Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), *Cliff House and Bay of San Francisco*, o.c., 17-1/2" x 29-1/2", n.d.

Probably painted in 1871 or 1872, during his second trip to San Francisco, this unusual canvas is unique in Bierstadt's oeuvre as the only known representation of a famous hotel. Albeit marginalized by the quintessential painter of wilderness, the blandishments of civilization are here contrasted with the stormy violence of sea and sky. Perched on the edge of the Pacific Ocean overlooking Seal Rocks, the Cliff House was a fashionable gathering place for the San Francisco elite.³⁷⁷ The Billingses also stayed at the hotel for several months after their marriage in 1862.

During the spring of 1872, while awaiting for winter snows to melt in order to access the High Sierras, Bierstadt sketched in and around San Francisco Bay. Among a series of marine paintings made at this time were

views of the Farallons Islands, Seal Rock and presumably *Cliff House and Bay of San Francisco*.³⁷⁸ In each of these works Bierstadt addressed the difficult painterly problem of rendering translucent, emerald-green waves. The composition employed for the Billingses' painting is a reprise of one of the artist's earliest canvases, *The Marina Piccola, Capri* (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo) of 1859.³⁷⁹

For purposes of understanding and interpretation, this view of the extreme western edge of the continent requires to be seen in relation to a number of Hudson River school paintings of the famed Catskill Mountain House, from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Painted by such figures as Cole, Gifford and Kensett, the Catskill Mountain House was the earliest great resort hotel in America catering to the devotees of landscape tourism.³⁸⁰ Perched high above the Hudson River Valley, the Catskill Mountain House, like the later Cliff House, afforded panoramic views of the "primal American wilderness." If the imperatives of Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism can be understood to have been born in and around New York City and the Hudson River, the realization of these ideological imperatives can be symbolized by the Cliff House, the architectural embodiment of the westering mandate.³⁸¹ Assuredly these associations were not lost upon Frederick Billings, one of the principal architects of the trans-continental railroad system.



Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), *The Matterhorn*, o.c., 40" x 28", n.d.

A Rockefeller acquisition, this view of the Matterhorn, the dominant scenic feature of the valley of Zermatt in Switzerland, is of uncertain date. Bierstadt painted at least three other versions of the Matterhorn, examples being found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Dallas Museum of Art and the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska.³⁸² Stylistically this painting belongs to the artist's mid-career, with Hendricks proposing a date of 1878 for the Metropolitan view, the image most closely related to the Mansion's in style and composition.³⁸³ Bierstadt first visited Switzerland in July of 1856, hiking in the company of Hudson River School colleagues Sanford Gifford, Worthington Whittredge and others through the Bernese Oberland over the Saint Gotthard Pass into Italy. It is not known whether he visited Zermatt on that occasion. In any event Bierstadt continued to paint reminiscences of Swiss scenery throughout his career.

The Matterhorn was considered, then as now, one of the most "sublime" mountains in the world. It entered into the consciousness of Anglo-Americans through the writings of Edward Whymper, whose first ascent of the mountain occurred in 1865. His account *Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-1869*, a classic of climbing literature, was published in 1871 and describes the tragic accident, which befell several members of the party who died on the descent from the summit. More has been written about this incident than any other climbing event, including the conquest of Mount Everest. The tragedy is usually associated with the end of the golden age of mountaineering. An epic of courage, resourcefulness and perseverance, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* fully embodied the era's belief in Anglo-Saxon industriousness and racial superiority. As a German-American, Albert Bierstadt doubtless did not subscribe to these pervasive views, the mountain more likely signifying for him a sublime form rather than a racial narrative.



Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), *Scenery in the Grand Tetons*, o.c., 29" x 43", n. d.

This beautiful painting is surely incorrectly identified as a view of the Grand Tetons. Rather it is directly related to a series of views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Lake Tahoe executed in the late 1860s.³⁸⁴ As the precise topographic site of the painting cannot be determined, it is more

than likely that it is an amalgam of California scenery, a common compositional strategy with Bierstadt. An oil sketch at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, also incorrectly labeled *The Grand Tetons* according to Gordon Hendricks, might have served as a preliminary study for this Rockefeller acquisition, which clearly adheres to the spirit of the Billings Collection.³⁸⁵ Though Bierstadt did visit Yellowstone Park in 1881, a date considerably later than *Scenery in the Grand Tetons*, to paint the geysers he did not go via Jackson Hole and the Tetons. In this connection Gordon Hendricks wryly observes: "In spite of a number of Bierstadt paintings which dealers have given Grand Teton titles, the artist did not visit the Tetons on this, the only trip during which he approached the area."³⁸⁶



William Bradford (1832-1892), *Sunset in the Yosemite Valley*, 29" x 47" , 1881.

Bradford painted this sunset view of Yosemite Valley in 1881, perhaps hoping to benefit from the fame and success of his friend and mentor Albert Bierstadt, who sixteen years earlier had shocked the New York art world with the submission of an enormous canvas entitled *Looking Down Yosemite Valley* (Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama) at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design.³⁸⁷ This celebrated painting, which was given pride of place in the gallery, was met with an outpouring of critical opinion,

both for and against Bierstadt's grandiloquent invocation of the aesthetic of the sublime.³⁸⁸ Con-temporaneous reception ranged from praise for the accuracy of the depiction ("we have been brought face to face with Nature's living rock") to assertions of deceit ("this acre-and-a-half of slovenly and monstrous stage-scenery"). Like Bierstadt before him, Bradford made copious use of the recently invented cadmium pigments, especially orange and yellow, to animate his blazing sunset at the western end of the valley. So pronounced was the vogue for cadmium pigments at the time that one critic was moved to pronounce that American landscape painting had become infected by "an epidemic of virulent sunsets."³⁸⁹

Despite his reliance upon Bierstadt's pictorial operatics, Bradford's turbulent view of the Yosemite at twilight departs subtly from its illustrious predecessor. From a low foreground vantage our eye is led up the winding Merced river toward a flaming sunset at the horizon. Enframed by El Capitan on the right and Cathedral Rocks on the left, the view is predictably conventional, yet grounded more perceptibly in actuality than the more flamboyant work of Bradford's mentor.³⁹⁰ Writing for a San Francisco newspaper, the satirist Ambrose Bierce delivered a heated polemic on the subject of Bierstadt's imitators:

It is with grim satisfaction that we record the destruction by fire of Bierstadt's celebrated picture of Yosemite Valley. The painting has been a prolific parent of ten thousand abominations. We have had Yosemite in oils, in watercolor, in crayon, in chalk and charcoal until in our very dreams we imagine ourselves falling from the summit of El Capitan or descending in spray from the Bridal Veil cataract. Besides that picture has incited more unpleasant people to visit California than all our conspiring hotel keepers could compel to return.³⁹¹

Between 1875 and 1880 Bradford visited the Yosemite on several occasions, as reported in San Francisco newspapers.³⁹² Despite his clear reliance upon Bierstadt's theatrical precedent, critics recognized that Bradford was less given to flights of fancy:

The Yosemite of Mr. Bradford is quite another region from that of Bierstadt. One feels no inclination to dream in looking at these reproductions, for reproductions they are in the fullest sense of the word. Undoubtedly the wonderful valley is painted as the artist saw it, and if he looked at it without the spectacles of imagination, or even without strong emotion, and simply busied himself with rendering actual rocks, trees, and sunsets.³⁹³

Close comparison with Bierstadt's composition broadly confirms this evaluation; the famous rock formations in Bradford's painting are more in conformity with Watkins' photographic views from the same vantage than Bierstadt's "vast machinery of advertisement and puffery."³⁹⁴ Bradford's well-known use of photography, perhaps as a consequence of his friendship with Watkins, as an aide-memoir in composition may partially account for his pronounced topographic fidelity to the site.³⁹⁵



Alfred Thompson Bricher (1837-1908),
Golden October, o.c., 23-1/2" x 19-1/2", 1870.

Thought of today, if at all, as somewhat less than a major talent, Alfred Thompson Bricher might best be described as an amiable eclectic. His numerous views of the New England coastline are composed and executed in the classic Luminist mode and are generally reliant upon the work of John Frederick Kensett.³⁹⁶ Contrasting coastal headlands with glassy expanses of water, he produced emphatically lateral compositions "given focal order by the molten sun."³⁹⁷ Bricher's New England landscapes, however, appear to be the work of an entirely different artist. Vertical in orientation and atmospheric in treatment, they reprise the compositions and coloration of Sanford Gifford, another leading member of the second generation of Hudson River School artists.³⁹⁸ Like Gifford, Bricher employs a solitary enframing birch tree contrasted with a distant hillside, illumined by a hazy sun located in the central vortex of the picture. In her insightful study of Sanford Gifford, Ila Weiss has defined this atmospheric style as "aerial Luminism" and contrasted it with the better-known movement of classic Luminism.³⁹⁹

Unique among American painters of the Hudson River School, Bricher was capable of practicing both modes of Luminism alternately in his seascapes and landscapes.



John William Casilear (1811-1893), *The Gathering Storm*, o.c., 6-3/4" x 9-3/4", n.d.

One of the few landscapes in the collection that represents the domesticated landscape as opposed to the "wilderness," this small oil reflects the influence of the French Barbizon painters who came into vogue during the 1870s and radically transformed the character of American art. Though attributed to John William Casilear, this painting is not consistent with his known style. On the basis of published works of art and the few surviving critical accounts, Casilear was a paradigmatic painter of the second generation of the Hudson River School, his canvases generally falling under the rubric of Luminism.⁴⁰⁰ The contemporaneous writer Henry Tuckerman described Casilear's style in terms redolent of his master, Asher Durand or his close friend John E. Kensett. According to the dean of American critics, Casilear's canvases

are finished with great care, and the subjects chosen with fastidious taste; the habit of dealing strictly with form, gives a curious correctness to the details of his work; there is nothing dashing, daring,

or off-hand; all is correct, delicate, and indicative of a sincere feeling for truth, both executive and moral; not so much a passion for beauty as a love of elegance, is manifest; the precise, the firm, and the graceful traits of artistic skill, belong to Casilear.⁴⁰¹

By way of marked contrast to this critical account, *The Gathering Storm* is loosely painted with a thick impasto of pigment, a technique derived from the practices of French Barbizon artists. The general informality of the scene, which depicts a few sheep among boulders in a meadow with a stormy sky, also adheres to the Barbizon program of cultivated pastoralism rather than focusing upon the broad, panoramic vistas preferred by the Hudson River School artists.⁴⁰² Instead of composing a detailed view of the panoramic grandeur of the landscape, French Barbizon painters and their American followers sought to capture intimate details of nature and the transitory effects of weather and light. As Bolger and Voorsanger have observed: "Working mainly out-of-doors and using vigorous, unblended strokes, they created a rough-textured painting surface usually associated with sketches and studies, and, through their masterly handling of thick pigments and heavy brushwork, minimized pictorial depth."⁴⁰³ This definition of the French aesthetic perfectly accords with the style and subject of *The Gathering Storm*, a work which affords evidence of the appearance of the new movement in America.

According to Robert Herbert, one of the principal interpreters of Barbizon ideology, these images of the French and American countryside signified a rejection of the city and industrialization together with a nostalgic desire to return to the soil. In addition, the consoling vision of peasant life was understood as denoting permanence and stability, attitudes not lost on Frederick Billings.⁴⁰⁴

The American pictorial genre of animal-landscape⁴⁰⁵, to which *The Gathering Storm* belongs, however, possessed little of the socio-religious resonance of the French movement. Informed by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the sempiternal oppression of the European peasantry, French Barbizon painting carried with it a political charge that held little meaning for Americans.⁴⁰⁶ Rather American “parlor-pastorals” were largely understood as a form of “painted poetry,” the evocation of an emotion or a mood rather than a statement of revolutionary outrage.⁴⁰⁷

Among American painters of the animal-landscape who worked in the Barbizon mode, Robert Crannell Minor’s (1839-1904) canvases bear a strong resemblance to *The Gathering Storm*, providing grounds for a possible reattribution.⁴⁰⁸



Harry Chase (1853-1889), *Dutch Pinkie Coming to Anchor*, o.c., 13-1/2" x 23-1/2", c. 1875.

The acquisition of this beautiful marine painting affords a modicum of insight into Frederick Billings’ collecting mentality. The survival of a lengthy letter from the artist in Munich, dated March 12, 1875, indicates that a canvas was commissioned by Billings directly from Chase, a native of Woodstock who worked mainly abroad as a specialist in maritime subjects.⁴⁰⁹ Unfortunately, the letter is concerned mostly with financial arrangements and does not provide information as regards the possible meanings the work held for the Billingses. A reasonable supposition is that loyalty to a locally born

artist, rather than a deep affection for the sea, supplied the motivation for the commission.

The facture of *Dutch Pinkie Coming to Anchor*, the signature “loaded-brush” of the Munich school, implies that Chase was trained in that city’s academy. According to a curiously conflicted statement in an American publication of the period,

Mr. Chase is better known in Europe than in America. The atmosphere of all Mr. Chase’s pictures is salty and natural to the ocean. The artist is a natural born lover of the ocean in her stormy moods and a more truthful interpreter in the present day and generation of the sea in its grandest effects is not to be found in any country than the young America.⁴¹⁰

A studio artist who spent time before the mast, Chase was singled out by another publication of the era: “A number of artists desert the land altogether and make the heaving deck their summer studio. Harry Chase in his yacht *Bonnie* has coasted our shores in search of artistic booty.”⁴¹¹



Thomas Cole (1801-1848), *Citadel and Waterfall*, o.c., 7-3/4" x 10-3/4", c. 1838 and *Tower by Moonlight*, o.c., 9-1/2" x 13-3/4", c. 1838.

These two small oil sketches were acquired by the Billingses in 1879 from the estate of Thomas Cole, who had died in 1848. Three letters in the archives at Olana indicate that the painter Frederic Edwin Church acted as the executor for the sale, which also included the larger, finished *Niagara*. Probably painted in 1838, after Cole had left New York City to take up residence in Catskill, the two studio sketches were studies for commissions that were never fully realized. *Citadel and Waterfall* is loosely related to a painting in a private collection, *Castle on Mountaintop with Cataract*, while *Tower by Moonlight* never eventuated in a finished canvas. Ellwood Parry relates *Tower by Moonlight* to a sketch in another private collection (*Study for Genevieve*), both of which were preparatory to a major work based on a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge entitled "Introduction to the Tail of the Dark

Ladie."⁴¹² Inspired by the fashionable gothicism of early Romanticism, these pseudo-medieval images reflect Cole's ambition to represent a "higher landscape," a cultivated world of the imagination.⁴¹³

Though Cole executed numerous oil sketches, both in plein-air and in the studio, he never placed them on exhibition or intended them for sale.⁴¹⁴ By the time the Billingses acquired them through the mediation of Church, the oil sketch had become a marketable commodity and was avidly collected, displayed and frequently preferred to a finished canvas.⁴¹⁵

Though Thomas Cole's once formidable reputation as the greatest American landscape painter had significantly declined by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is likely that the Billingses acquired these paintings due to their respect for the opinions of Frederic Church who advocated their purchase.



Thomas Cole (1801-1848), *Niagara Falls*, oil on panel, 19" x 24-1/4", c. 1830.

In historical terms, this small canvas is arguably the most important painting in the collection. Not only is it the oldest landscape acquired by the Billingses, a view of a quintessential American site, it is aesthetically among the most pleasing.⁴¹⁶ Painted in London during Cole's first visit to Europe, it is closely related to an almost

identically scaled painting (*Distant View of Niagara Falls*, 1830) in the Art Institute of Chicago.⁴¹⁷ Both landscapes were based on a drawing in Cole's sketchbook (Detroit Institute of Arts) made during a visit to the Falls in May of 1829 prior to his departure for Europe. In his sketchbook Cole noted: "Arrived at Niagara—on the American side. I anticipated much but the grandeur of the falls far exceed anything I had been told about them. I think the subject a sublime one, but I may fail in the representation as others have done before me."⁴¹⁸ The better documented Chicago painting, containing Indians in the immediate foreground amidst blazing autumn foliage, was copied as the engraved frontispiece for John Howard Hinton's *The History and Topography of the United States* (London, 1832), the first important European illustrated text dealing with American scenery.⁴¹⁹ Engraved and published separately as well as reproduced on pink Staffordshire pottery, *Distant View of Niagara Falls* was the most widely disseminated image of the famous American icon during the early Romantic period.

In a long letter (1 March, 1830) to one of his New York patrons, Cole mentions his attempt to exhibit *Niagara Falls*:

In the hope of keeping up my funds, I have painted several pictures, one which is the Falls of Niagara; and the artists and others who have seen it in my room expressed themselves highly pleased with it. I sent it to the Gallery of the British Institution, which has just opened for Exhibition. Imagine the mortification of finding it, as well as another picture of mine, hung so that it cannot be seen. I have been told that is what a stranger must expect at that place.⁴²⁰

Purchased by the Billingses from the estate of Thomas Cole in 1879, *Niagara Falls* was shown in the 1848 New York Memorial Exhibition in commemoration of the artist's premature death. A sequence of letters from

the painter Frederic Church, the executor of Cole's estate, to Frederick Billings indicates that the painting was carefully restored by Mr. Oliver of New York who had "it in his hands a long time" so that "all the cracks have disappeared—the picture looks brighter, clearer and most charming in color."⁴²¹ Importantly, these letters indicate that the Cole purchases were a joint venture on the part of Frederick and Julia.

The importance of this painting lies especially in its invocation of the aesthetics of the "sublime." On the eve of his departure for Europe Cole avowed to his patron Gilmore: "I cannot think of going to Europe without having seen Niagara. I wish to take a last, lingering look at our wild scenery. I shall endeavour to impress its features so strongly on my mind that, in the midst of the fine scenery of other countries, their grand and beautiful peculiarities shall not be erased."⁴²² Painted at a time when the Falls were already undergoing significant transformation, the landscape affords a narrative of historical recovery. A vision of natural pre-history, it is a stark image of the primal American wilderness. The storm-tossed clouds, bold juxtapositions of light and dark and, most conspicuously, the blasted stumps and dead tree in the left foreground are conventional early Romantic signifiers for the gothic "sublime," the cultural conceit that nature can be threatening as well as beautiful, terrifying as well as uplifting. By 1879, the time of the acquisition of *Niagara Falls* by the Billingses, the sublime was no longer a potent aesthetic or philosophical force, existing more as an historical curiosity than a psychological reality. The awareness of the simultaneous degradation of the actual, as opposed to the virtual, *Niagara Falls* by industry and tourism, a process that had begun prior to Cole's visit but fell to its nadir in the late nineteenth century, was instrumental in the creation of the first National Parks.⁴²³



Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823-1900), *High Bridge, New York*, o.c., 11-3/4" x 23-3/4", 1879.

Unlike many captains of industry, Frederick Billings did not collect paintings of the railroad in the landscape—the so-called triumphalist image of the machine in the garden. Nor did he commission canvases representing the displacement of Indians by the iron horse, as did several other railroad magnates. For that matter there is very little evidence in the collection of works of art celebrating the triumph of industrial technology over nature.⁴²⁴ Rather he preferred painted visions of primal wilderness, agrarian harmony, and pre-industrial innocence.⁴²⁵ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the canvas was acquired by Laurance Rockefeller during the 1950s and not by Frederick Billings.

Cropsey's *High Bridge, New York*, an image of the famous stone aqueduct across the Harlem River connecting the Bronx to Morningside Heights, is one of only three canvases in the collection that makes any direct allusion to the contemporaneous world of industry and urban life. The first bridge linking Manhattan to the mainland, High Bridge brought water to the city from upland reservoirs and was under construction between 1837 and 1842. *Nelsons' Guide to Lake George and Lake Champlain*, published in 1858, describes the bridge as spanning the

whole width of the valley and the river at a point where the latter is 620 feet wide, and the former a quarter of a mile. Eight arches, each with a span of 80 feet, compose this structure; and the elevation of the arches gives 100 feet

clear of the river from their lower side. The material employed throughout the whole of this imposing object is granite. The water is led over this bridge, which is 1450 feet in extent, in iron pipes; and over all is a pathway, which though wide enough for carriages, is available to pedestrians only. The bridge is well worthy of a visit from all who desire to obtain a proper idea of the enterprise of the inhabitants of New York. It cost 900,000 dollars.⁴²⁶

Jasper Cropsey, one of the leading artists of the second generation of the Hudson River School, made a minor specialty out of painting aqueducts, viaducts and railroad bridges for industrialists. In these paintings he invariably "assimilated" these man-made artifacts into the aesthetic mode of the landscape picturesque, making them appear compatible with the natural world. In his best-known painting, *The Starrucca Viaduct*, a view of the famous bridge on the route of the New York and Erie Railroad, he so thoroughly idealized the scene as to make this "Eighth Wonder of the World" part and parcel of the landscape itself. In another connection his views of graceful viaducts evoked associations with another favorite theme of New York painters, the engineering feats of the ancient Romans.⁴²⁷ It has been noted with regard to Cropsey's paintings that he sought to produce "an echo of Italy in the American landscape. . . . Valley and hills, the long line of the railroad viaduct . . . recalled the landscape and aqueducts about Tivoli."⁴²⁸

High Bridge, New York, like most of his major canvases, stages the scene in the fall of the year. The most strident colorist among the artists of the Hudson River School, Cropsey employed blazing autumn foliage as a signifier for the nationalist content of the work. The equation of American engineering with the aqueducts of ancient Rome is another of the artist's signature

strategies for assimilating the products of modern technology to the world of culture. Responding to Ralph Waldo Emerson's radical mandate to the artist to reattach "things to nature and the whole—re-attaching even artificial things, and violations nature, to nature, by a deeper insight," Cropsey strove to achieve a landscape of reconciliation.⁴²⁹

While High Bridge was frequently photographed and painted during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most especially by the American Impressionist Ernest Lawson (1873-1939) and the early twentieth century realist George Luks (1866-1933), Cropsey's is among the earliest images of the bridge.⁴³⁰ The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art survey of paintings lists a view of High Bridge in the New York Historical Society, dated 1877, by the little known artist Paul Dixon. A large watercolor of *High Bridge* (Fig. 16), recently acquired by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, is presumably the earliest extant image of the structure. Painted in 1848 by John William Hill (1812-1872), an English-born advocate of John Ruskin's doctrine of "truth to nature," the structure of the High Bridge affords a modernist antidote to the agricultural activities depicted in the foreground of the image.⁴³¹



Fig. 16: John William Hill, *High Bridge: Harlem River* (c. 1848-1851), Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.



William Parsons Winchester Dana (1833-1927), *Brittany Beach*, o.c., 15-1/2" x 28-1/2", c. 1865-1870.

Currently relegated to the status of a footnote in the history of American art, during the Victorian era Dana was one of the more celebrated artists exhibiting at the National Academy of Design. Henry Tuckerman described him in 1867 as "an accomplished member of the modern French school," by which he meant that he was an early graduate of Paris' Ecole des Beaux-Arts.⁴³²

Brittany Beach, a twilight scene of peasants gathering seaweed on a placid coastal shore, is painted in the meticulously finished, realist style of the French salon as seen, for example, in Charles Théodore Frère's *Sunset Scene on the Nile*. "His [Dana's] method and manner, his coloring and ideas of art," averred Tuckerman, "are remarkably loyal to the French school." In this connection, Dana was in the vanguard of American artists studying in France, having gone first to Paris in 1857. Sometime after that date he began painting coastal scenes in Brittany, leading Tuckerman to observe in 1867: "His original tendency was for marine landscapes, and in these, where the scene is the coast of France, he has been frequently successful."

As perhaps the first American artist to depict Breton life, Dana anticipated the formation of the Pont-Aven art colony during the 1860s to which scores of Americans ultimately belonged.⁴³³ Scenes of French peasant life, like Orientalist images of Near Eastern fellahin, offered assurance to industrialists like Frederick Billings of humanity's sempiternal bond with the soil. "Neither artists nor viewers seemed to tire,"

according to Lois Fink, “of the drudgery or pleasures of the French peasantry. Convenient, accessible, accustomed to having artists track through their fields and even their homes, French peasants of the nineteenth century became most popular of all subjects for French and American Salon painters.”⁴³⁴ Unlike the majority of New York’s Gilded Age collectors, however, Billings acted upon the nostalgic vision of pastoral harmony embedded in these canvases. At some deep level, the Woodstock model farm can be understood as an attempt to actualize the timeless ideals projected by such paintings as *Brittany Beach*.



Harry H. Davis (fl. 1853-1884), *Hudson Highlands—West Point*, o.c., 22" x 36", 1873.

One of only four paintings in the collection that represent views upon or near the Hudson river, this panoramic canvas may well have embodied significant, even conflicted, associations for the Billingses. The artist employed a formulaic highland view from the north, looking south towards Storm King Mountain and the group of buildings of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point. A storm-darkened sky and a muted palette afford an aura of Romantic atmosphere for the scene. Similar in topography and composition to numerous Hudson River School paintings of the mid- to late nineteenth century, *Hudson Highlands—West Point* recalled for informed New Yorkers a landscape inscribed with deep cultural meanings.⁴³⁵ Self-servingly styled as “Nature’s

great Academy of American landscape art,” the region was the epicenter for Knickerbocker cultural imperialism.⁴³⁶ As both a devout New Englander and a sometimes-reluctant resident of New York City, Frederick Billings found himself at the center of an intense rivalry between the two regions in a contest for cultural primacy.⁴³⁷

For the Billingses the meaning of this specific landscape was probably twofold, carrying in the first instance a public and, in the second, a more private connotation. For most viewers of the period the Hudson Highlands above West Point embodied a nationalist historic narrative. It was, for example, the site of the capture of the British spy, Major Andre, during the Revolutionary War. Andre, wearing civilian clothes and carrying Benedict Arnold’s plan for the betrayal of West Point to the English, was apprehended by patriots and later hanged for spying.⁴³⁸ The power of landscape images to elicit historic, moral and social narratives was well understood during the period as the theory of associationism and was grounded in the claim that aesthetic pleasure proceeded not from the inherent qualities of images but from the ideas attached to them.⁴³⁹ The capacity of the Romantics to derive a “higher landscape” from the raw facts of nature was, as in this instance, one of the more developed imaginative skills of the era.⁴⁴⁰

A second, more private meaning for the image possibly lay in its connection to the family of Julia Billings. The palatial, Italianate villa of Thomas P. Rossiter, the husband of Julia’s prematurely deceased sister Anna, was located near the site of the painting.⁴⁴¹ That the Billingses continued their relationship with Rossiter is suggested by the fact that Anna’s and Thomas’ son Ehrick Kensett Rossiter, an architect, was commissioned to design the carriage house at the Woodstock estate. The Hudson Highlands, near Irvington-on-Hudson—a genial and cultivated neighborhood—was also the

home of Frederick's former business partner John C. Frémont and his wife Jesse Benton as well as of the financier Jay Gould and the painter Albert Bierstadt.

Another element of later Hudson River landscapes such as *Hudson Highlands* was the development of a sequential spatial structure "whose function was to delineate America's progressive triumph over nature." Characterized by "smooth spatial transitions between foreground, middle ground and distance, framing *repoussoirs*, and aerial perspective," this formula represented wilderness yielding to cultivation.⁴⁴² By contrast, contemporaneous New England compositions painted, for example, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, generally reversed the scheme, depicting a domesticated foreground gradually yielding to a distant view of wilderness.⁴⁴³ The purport of these works was to stress a condominium of man with nature rather than the invocation of the nationalist rhetoric of paintings of primal wilderness.



Asher Durand (1796-1886), *Autumn Landscape*, o.c., 11-1/2" x 16-1/4", c. 1847.

This painting, depicting a Conestoga wagon and a solitary walker moving toward an autumnal sunset, is related to a number of works on a similar westering theme executed around mid-century.⁴⁴⁴ Of these the most celebrated is Frederic Edwin Church's *New England Scenery* of 1851

(George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts).⁴⁴⁵ The historian Angela Miller has written: "The westward moving Conestoga wagon . . . evoked the literal fulfillment in the present of the original Puritan migration which had given rise to a new epoch in history."⁴⁴⁶ According to this account, these images of migration denoted New England's pivotal role in the formation of the broader national culture. A competing view is advocated by William Truettner, who interprets these scenes as elegies, which focus nostalgically on the New England landscape as a "denial of the expansionist impulse that had already sent wagon trains to Oregon and California."⁴⁴⁷ Another possible reading of the image, which may account for its relevance to the career and sensibilities of Frederick Billings, relates to the beginning of the decline of New England on the national scene. A spate of twilight imagery painted at the height of the Romantic period most often signified the passing or extirpation of a culture, whether it be northeast wilderness, rural farmers or nomadic Indians. Such paintings—sunset elegies, as it were—may have recalled for Billings the imperative to restore New England's cultural and agricultural life.



John Whetten Ehninger (1827-1889), *Wedding Procession, Miles Standish*, o.c., 17-1/2" x 24-1/2", 1861.

This small canvas should more correctly be entitled *The Wedding Procession of Priscilla and John Alden*. Based on the popular 1858 poem of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, Ehninger's painting represents the conclusion of the poem where Miles Standish is reconciled with the bridal couple Priscilla and John Alden. Seated upon a "snow-white bull," Priscilla, as recounted in the poem, is flanked by the standing figures of Standish and Alden and followed by a file of Pilgrims.⁴⁴⁸ According to a recent scholarly account, the painting was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York in 1861 after which "Ehninger appears to have abandoned his sporadic efforts at historical painting."⁴⁴⁹

Wedding Procession is the only narrative "history" painting in the collection, its acquisition holding special meaning for Frederick and Julia. In a diary entry three days after her wedding (April 2, 1862) Julia recounts that "Frederick read Miles Standish to me. It was a very happy day, the more so because I greatly enjoyed listening to the poem as he read it."⁴⁵⁰ Although purchased twenty-six years after the Billingses' marriage, the painting surely evoked for them, in addition to its personal message, a sense of pride in American history and their place in it.⁴⁵¹

The Pilgrim experience was a popular theme in nineteenth century art.⁴⁵² The early

colonists were re-inscribed in art and literature as central protagonists of an historical progression, which began with Christopher Columbus and culminated, among other things, in the transcontinental railroad and the fulfillment of America's Manifest Destiny. An important precedent for Ehninger's painting, one that it tacitly acknowledges through its compositional derivation, is George Caleb Bingham's celebrated canvas of 1851, *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through The Cumberland Gap* (Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis).⁴⁵³ This well-known painting, with its clear reference to religious iconographies for "The Flight into Egypt" or "Moses Leading the Israelites into the Promised Land," was widely understood by nineteenth century viewers as providential sanction for western expansion.⁴⁵⁴

Prior to making the oil painting, Ehninger produced in 1858 eight pencil drawings for an early version of a deluxe, leather-bound "coffee-table book," entitled *Illustrations of Longfellow's Courtship of Miles Standish by John W. Ehninger. Photographed from the Original Drawings by Brady* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1859). Proclaimed by Henry Tuckerman to have "proved a favorite gift-book," a copy was owned by the Billingses, containing eight photo-reproductions (presumably by Matthew Brady) of the original drawings.⁴⁵⁵ Quite possibly this book is the earliest American publication to employ photography for the reproduction of artworks, a subject upon which there is no available information. In a journal entry of November 28, 1858 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote: "Ehninger has sent me a beautiful illustration of Miles Standish. It is the bridal procession going through the Plymouth woods; and is full of feeling."⁴⁵⁶



Jerome Elwell (1847-1912), *Near Norman's Woe—Sea Coast Manchester*, o.c., 7" x 11-1/2", 1877.

This small painting is another of the Billingses' acquisitions associated with their mutual affection for the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Norman's Woe is a large rock located between Gloucester and Manchester off the southern coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts, infamous for the large number of ships that foundered on it. Norman's Woe, and the tragic tale of the little girl lashed to the mast of a wrecked schooner ("But the cruel rocks they gored her side / Like the horns of an angry bull"), was immortalized by Longfellow's *Wreck of the Hesperus* (1841) and its closing lines: "Christ save us all from a death like this / On the reef of Norman's Woe." Though Elwell's small canvas does not represent a specific episode from Longfellow's poem, it surely was intended by the artist to stimulate the literary imagination.

Norman's Woe was first painted by the Gloucester artist Fitz Hugh Lane in 1862. Elwell, also a native of Gloucester and younger than Lane, made something of a specialty copying the older, better-known artist's works.⁴⁵⁷ *Near Norman's Woe*, a view of Gloucester Harbor from Rocky Point, does not reflect any known composition by Lane. Instead it is a rather conventional Romantic seascape with two diminutive figures gazing at a turbulent sunset over water. For reasons as perplexing as unknown, Jerome Elwell, currently consigned to near total oblivion, is described in *Thieme-Becker's Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler* as among "the best American artists with which to reckon."⁴⁵⁸



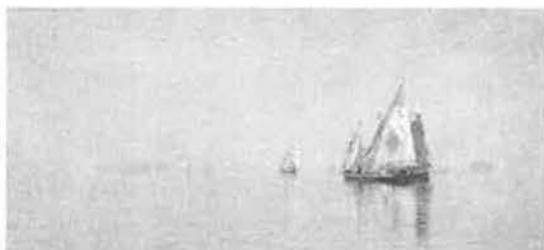
Charles Théodore Frère (1814-1888), *On The Nile*, o.c., 15" x 30", c. 1878 and *Canal Flniaciah [?] Cairo, Egypt*, o.c., 6-1/2" x 11-1/2", 1870s.

These two works by Frère, one of the most popular nineteenth century painters of Orientalist subjects, are among the four canvases in the collection that depict themes of the Muslim Near East. Painted in either Paris or Cairo where he maintained studios at the height of the Orientalist vogue, Frère's canvases were extremely popular with American and European collectors. The artist made his début at the French Salon in 1834 and two years later went to Algiers, traveling extensively throughout the Near East before taking up residence in Cairo on a semi-permanent basis. At the Paris Salon of 1878 he exhibited *The Nile—Evening*, which may be the painting in the Billingses' collection.⁴⁵⁹

Frère's small, cabinet-sized canvases are best described as Orientalist landscapes rather than the more popular genre scenes of harems and slave markets that provided the most prevalent form of Orientalism during the nineteenth century. The function of such paintings as *On the Nile*, with its distant twilight view of the pyramids at Giza, was assuredly to remind the Billingses of the famous monuments of antiquity rather than to serve the political agenda of

colonialism.⁴⁶⁰ The prevalence of trees and water in the foreground of *On the Nile*, together with the serene calm evoked by an evening twilight, resonates more closely with another painting in the collection, William P. W. Dana's *Brittany Beach*, than with the exotic Orientalist confections of Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose *Turkish Interior* (currently unlocated) was one of the most prominently featured works in the New York collection.⁴⁶¹

The representation of primitive means of transportation, whether foregrounded against the Nile or, as in the case of Dana's canvas, against the coast of Brittany, and the evocation of nostalgia for a pre-industrial world of simplicity, a theme common to several works in the Billingses' collection, unite these paintings in their joint appeal to Frederick's and Julia's sensibilities.



Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880), *Venice*, o.c., 11" x 24", 1864.

One of twenty paintings made by Gifford between 1868 and 1880 on the theme of Venice, this small oil was probably a study for a larger, identical painting that was owned by the Billingses' Madison Avenue neighbor Frederick Ferris Thompson.⁴⁶² The preliminary drawing from the artist's sketchbook upon which these several paintings were based has survived together with a sketch of the sail design featured in the Billingses' painting.⁴⁶³ Enormously popular with the artist's clientele, these smaller, finished Venetian "cabinet pictures" were attractive, according to Eleanor Harvey, "both for their appearance and the price, often less than half that of a full-scale

painting."⁴⁶⁴ Invoking his signature Venetian formula of juxtaposing an architectural skyline (Isola Povillia) and decorative sails against a glowing, reflective field, Gifford produced a canonic example of Luminist aesthetics.⁴⁶⁵ Luminist compositions, of which additional examples by Gifford, Kensett and Johnson are represented in the collection, stress low horizons, still, reflective bodies of water, open ends and horizontal formats.⁴⁶⁶

Gifford first visited Venice in July 1857 and again in June of 1869 when he made the drawing upon which the Venetian series is based.⁴⁶⁷ In a long letter to a friend, he wrote: "I did not know till now, when I am about leaving Venice forever, how strong a hold this dear old, magnificent, dilapidated, poverty-stricken city has taken on my affections. . . . Her material prosperity is gone, but the art which shed lustre upon it and made it glorious is not to be extinguished."⁴⁶⁸ The idea of Venice, non-industrial and technologically archaic, was first popularized for Anglo-Americans by the writings of John Ruskin, whose *The Stones of Venice* was first published in America in 1855.



James MacDougal Hart (1828-1901), *Mist in the Adirondacks*, o.c., 13-1/4" x 26-1/4", 1884.

Born in Scotland, James MacDougal Hart brought with him to America the memory of Sir Edwin Landseer's celebrated paintings of upland stags. *Mist in the Adirondacks* is clearly an effort to exploit the celebrity of one of Landseer's most famous canvases, *The Sanctuary* (1842), a gift of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert. In Landseer's painting a

large stag traversing the border of a lake startles a flock of ducks who take flight into a twilight sky. The first of his symbolic pictures of deer, *The Sanctuary* was understood to denote the violence that always lies beneath the surface of tranquillity. According to a British critic, the work intimated that “there was no purchasing safety for ourselves on this earth, without bringing trouble and peril to others.”⁴⁶⁹ A poem written by a friend of the artist accompanied the entry in the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue of 1842:

See where the startled wild fowl
screaming rise
And seek in marshaled flight those golden
skies.
Yon wearied swimmer scarce can win the
land,
His limbs yet falter on the water strand.
Poor hunted hart! The painful struggle
o'er
How blest the shelter of that island shore!
There, whilst he sobs, the panting heart
to rest,
Nor hound nor hunter shall his lair
molest.⁴⁷⁰

James Hart, along with his brother William, was a member of the Keene Valley colony of artists who summered in the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York State. *Mist in the Adirondacks* is typical of a number of deer paintings by Hart, all of which are distantly related to Landseer's animal pictures. Like Landseer, Hart positions his solitary deer at the edge of a body of water from which explodes a flock of startled ducks. A Romantic-Realist, schooled in the preferred style of the National Academy of Design, James Hart was one of the most prominent members of the Adirondack school of artists which included, among others, George Smillie, whose work is also featured in the Woodstock collection.⁴⁷¹



Hermann Herzog (1832-1932), *Flood Tide Ostend*, o.c., 17" x 22-3/4", 1869.

This small canvas, depicting a sailing vessel being winched into shore from a stormy sea, is a paradigmatic example of the Romantic coastal shipwreck theme. Jean Antoine Théodore Gudin's (1802-1880) *Shipwreck* (oil on canvas, 13-1/4" x 21", c. 1860-1870) also in the Woodstock collection, is a European variant on the subject.⁴⁷² Where the Frenchman foregrounds the scene with a rock, a traditional symbol for the church and faith, the German-American Herzog depicts a group of figures attempting to winch a stranded ship ashore. This latter subject, more typical for American than European marine painters, generally denotes the conflict between human will and the power of natural forces. Whereas the French painter grounds his subject in an older convention for salvation, Herzog is probably responding to the political symbolism of the “ship of state” and the immediate climate of the recently terminated American Civil War.⁴⁷³ Scenes of shipwreck and coastal salvation remained popular until the final decades of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷⁴ Shipwrecks, whether personal or political, struck a responsive chord in all Americans. No less a tastemaker than Andrew Jackson Downing, in his influential mid-century book *The Architecture of Country Houses*, implausibly connected the theme with the home: “the mere sentiment of home, with its thousand associations, has, like a strong

anchor, saved many a man from shipwreck in the storm of life."⁴⁷⁵

Arthur Quartley (1839-1886), the painter of *Boats Becalmed* (oil on canvas, 1879), provides an alternate vision of marine life. Calm in tone and coloration, stable in composition, the canvas speaks to the scaling-down of pictorial rhetoric in much of the art of the 1870s. Consciously limited in scale and subject, Quartley's astringent style represses the *Sturm und Drang* of Romantic imagery in the interest of evoking an image of quietude. This "chastening" of style based upon "a pronounced simplification in compositional massing, an increased sophistication and abstract quality of the scumbling used to depict sea and sky, an observable flattening of pictorial space and the use of color to complement the mood of the scene," has been related to a shift in the national culture in the aftermath of the Civil War.⁴⁷⁶

Paintings by Quartley are extremely rare, his career spanning little more than a decade. In 1881 critic G. W. Sheldon wrote that his "genius is indisputable . . . his finest period is undoubtedly yet to come, and when it does come, his reputation will be cosmopolitan."⁴⁷⁷



David Johnson (1827-1908), *Study, Harbor Island, Lake George*, o.c., 13-1/2" x 23-1/2," 1871.

With the intention of honoring the spirit of the Billings Collection, the Rockefellers acquired this painting in the 1960s as a complement to the Kensett view of *Lake George at Sunset* (1872), acquired by

Frederick and Julia. At the time the Rockefellers were no doubt unaware that Johnson's exacting realism, full of closely and precisely delineated details, was to a considerable extent inconsistent with the normative taste of the Billingses.⁴⁷⁸ Nowhere else in the collection is there an example of the scientific, quasi-photographic particularism of this painting. For the most part Frederick and Julia preferred romantically idealized, atmospherically-laden images of the American landscape, operatically transfigured in the manner of Bierstadt, or metaphorically charged with light in the Luminist style of Gifford and Kensett. By way of contrast, Johnson's tightly rendered, microscopically observed canvas conforms to a rival aesthetic program articulated by the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art, the American equivalent of the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.⁴⁷⁹

Whether or not Frederick and Julia were fully conscious of the cultural crisis of the 1860s and 1870s in which the Hudson River School came under siege from a younger generation of realists, they would surely have recognized some form of the critical rhetoric employed by one journalist writing in 1863: "They [Hudson River School artists] have done their work and, no doubt, done it to the extent of their ability; our business is only to bid them 'Farewell' while we turn to greet the young Americans who are to inaugurate the new day."⁴⁸⁰ Based on their collecting habits, the Billingses appear not to have been responsive to these exhortations, preferring instead the older Hudson River style or the newer Barbizon aesthetic. In both instances Romantic moodiness rather than quasi-scientific facticity afforded the dominant aesthetic and psychological affect. Johnson's *Harbor Island, Lake George*, uniquely within the collection, fails to embody this sensibility.

In conformity with the Romantic theory of associationism, few places in America possessed greater historical "associations" than Lake George. The setting for James

Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of Mohicans* (1826), the "Holy Horicon" evoked for Americans colonial history, Native American virtue and villainy, and the figure of the frontiersman, Natty Bumppo, the paradigmatic embodiment of national self-reliance. One of the great lakes of the world, Lake George was, according to Cooper, unparalleled: "In one particular indeed, this lake has scarcely an equal. We allude to its islands, which are said to equal the number of days of the year. . . . We claim for America the freshness of a most promising youth, and a species of natural radiance that carries the mind with reverence to the source of all this is glorious around us."⁴⁸¹

Johnson first visited Lake George in 1857 and in the following year all of his paintings exhibited at the National Academy of Design were of Lake George subjects. He returned again in 1871, and in each of the next five years exhibited at least one Lake George painting at the Academy. The size of the Billings-Rockefeller oil, together with an inscription, indicates that it was a study for a larger painting, although, consistent with Pre-Raphaelite practice, the study canvas is highly developed. Another oil study of 1871 in the collection of Henry Melville Fuller included another oil study of 1871, almost identical in location, size and coloration. This study, together with *Harbor Island, Lake George*, probably served for a larger, finished canvas dated 1876, currently in a private collection.⁴⁸² A number of exquisite line drawings from this period indicate that pencil was employed out-of-doors and oils executed in the studio.⁴⁸³ These drawing, like the oil study, focus upon the natural triad of earth, air and water. No figural *staffage* is present to animate or provide scale for the landscape. The composition of distant mountain and foreground rocks is framed by lateral islands to produce a balanced harmony that is replicated in the subtle tonal unity of the work. Employing a fine brush and minute, almost invisible, brushstrokes, Johnson

painted with scrupulous attention to detail and topography. Grounded in the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic of "truth to nature," this small cabinet picture follows the Ruskinian injunction to let "nature make the better part" of the painting.⁴⁸⁴



William Keith (1839-1911), *Mount Hood from Sandy River*, o.c., 30" x 45", n.d.

The deteriorated condition of this painting is due to the heavy glazing (the application of transparent layers of oil over colored pigments) that was, unfortunately, a significant practice of the artist's mature style.⁴⁸⁵ The near brown monotone color scheme of the canvas, like the dense glazing technique, was the product of the poorly assimilated influence of George Inness, the most admired American landscape painter of the later nineteenth century.⁴⁸⁶ Keith's view of Oregon's Mount Hood, however, for all of its reliance upon Inness' Tonalist, Barbizon-derived aesthetics, reverts to older panoramic compositional modes, rejecting the more intimate, pastoral scenery of Tonalism.⁴⁸⁷ The presence of a group of Indians in the foreground also invokes the earlier Romantic trope of historicizing the land, thus preserving the mythic illusion of the past through reference to the aboriginal inhabitants. These practices of erasure and denial of modern realities through studio manipulation, according to one account, offered assurances to Eastern audiences that

the grandeur of the West had not been compromised by progress.⁴⁸⁸ Conversely the inclusion of Indians as pictorial *staffage* could also serve as reminders of the ineluctable march of progress, their presence being equated with “ruins” of ancient civilizations.⁴⁸⁹

The Billingses’ painting of Mount Hood is one of several views of the mountain painted by Keith during his long career. According to an early biographer, he is reported to have climbed Mount Hood while working for the Oregon Navigation and Railroad (Henry Villard’s parent company for the takeover of the Northern Pacific), perhaps together with his lifelong friend John Muir.⁴⁹⁰ Among Keith’s many patrons were railroad magnates Edward T. Harriman, Collis P. Huntington and Frederick Billings. As the westernmost mountain peak visible on the route of the Northern Pacific and one of the first great mountains seen by Billings in his early reconnaissance for a transcontinental railroad line, Mount Hood evoked multiple resonances for the former president of the Railroad.

Mount Hood, one of several extant and active volcanoes in the Pacific Northwest, was first brought into national prominence by the art of Albert Bierstadt whose *Mount Hood, Oregon* (Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, 1865) was first exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York along with the much celebrated *Looking Down Yosemite Valley* (Birmingham Museum of Art, 1865). These views first introduced Easterners to the wonders of the American West, simultaneously creating a market over the next several decades for countless paintings of these sites.⁴⁹¹ The Northwest’s volcanic peaks were especially appealing subjects, as Frederic Edwin Church’s *Cotopaxi*, Latin America’s most spectacular volcano, had been exhibited to impassioned reviews in 1862. In both instances, north and south, volcanoes were seen as emblems of divine providence and nature’s awesome

force.⁴⁹² Another reference for both Keith and Church was Thomas Cole’s magisterial view of *Mount Aetna from Taormina* (1844), a view that was considered “one of the finest in the world.”⁴⁹³ In juxtaposing the classical ruins of an ancient Roman theater—the mutable works of man—with the eternal features of the landscape—the eternal works of God—Cole created a melancholy object for Romantic reflection. By way of contrast, in opposing the resurgent image of Mount Hood with “vanishing” Indian tribes, Keith paid homage to futurity and the westering trajectory of the “Course of Empire.” In describing Mount Hood, travel writer Theodore Winthrop wrote in 1862: “It is only lately in the development of men’s comprehensions of nature, that mountains have been recognized as our noblest friends, our most exalting and inspiring comrades, our grandest emblems of divine power and divine peace.”⁴⁹⁴ Earlier considered “the original barrier to Eden,” Mount Hood became during the course of the Billings era “a recreational Paradise.”⁴⁹⁵

William Keith was considered the most important painter in San Francisco during the second half of the nineteenth century. He was often ranked with Bierstadt and Bradford though, unlike them, he did not paint Mount Hood from the perspective of a New York studio. He also counted among his closest friends and traveling companions John Muir and Carleton Watkins. According to Peter Palmquist, Watkins’ biographer: “William Keith had nearly all of his artistic output documented by Watkins.”⁴⁹⁶ Near the end of the artist’s long career, Ina Donna Coolbrith (“The Sappho of the Western Sea”) dedicated several deathless verses to William Keith: “Upon the heights beyond my reach / You drink from art’s immortal spring / And visions dream beyond my speech / And paint the songs I may not sing.”⁴⁹⁷



John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872), *Lake George at Sunset*, o.c., 23-1/2" x 35-1/2", 1872.

This painting, like the smaller *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey*, also occupies a significant niche in the construction of the art history of the Hudson River School. A paradigmatic example of a body of canvases painted in the final year of his life, known collectively as "The Last Summer's Work," *Lake George at Sunset* was probably acquired by the Billingses at the large auction of Kensett's studio contents held in New York between March 24th and 29th, 1873.⁴⁹⁸ This well-documented event was widely reported in the press, an article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* being representative: "Mr. Kensett's last work, done during the past summer, consists of thirty-four pictures painted in three months, for that was the length of Mr. Kensett's last vacation, show remarkable industry and we know of no other artist who possesses such facility of execution, unless it is Mr. Frederic E. Church."⁴⁹⁹

The Last Summer's Work was painted in three different locations: Lake George, Newport, Rhode Island, and in and around Long Island Sound, near Darien, Connecticut where Kensett had a summer studio. The latter group of canvases, several of which were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by the artist's son, are considered the masterpieces of the painter's late style. By way of contrast the Lake George pictures are thought to be more conventional: "The Lake George pictures, mostly sketches, are not especially innovative in composition, color or technique."⁵⁰⁰ The Billingses' painting is,

however, an exception to this broader assessment. Any critical account of this painting must acknowledge that it is a finished canvas and that its boldly reductive composition, poetic interpretation of light, and loose handling of pigment accord more with the seacoast paintings than the more conventional Lake George views.⁵⁰¹ Comparison with the earlier *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey* reveals that Kensett had dramatically altered his style in the direction of greater colorism, denser atmospheric and more active brushwork. Roque, who apparently did not know *Lake George at Sunset*, has argued for the influence of the paintings of English landscape painter J. M. W. Turner on the "Last Summer's Work," citing the reading of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* as the critical conduit for the development of the late style.⁵⁰² In *Modern Painters* Ruskin, the most influential art critic who has ever existed, paradoxically advocated both an aesthetic of "truth-to-nature" and the painterly facture and color pyrotechnics of J. M. W. Turner.⁵⁰³



John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872), *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey*, o.c., 5-3/4" x 11-1/4", 1853-1856.

In September 1853, the painter's old friend George Curtis, editor of *Harper's Weekly*, invited Kensett to visit the Navesink Highlands in New Jersey, near Red Bank, where the Shrewsbury River empties into the Atlantic.⁵⁰⁴ From this visit eventuated no fewer than five closely-related views of the Atlantic coastline, which were pivotal in the

development of the artist's personal style as well as the broader movement known as Luminism.⁵⁰⁵ A gift from the artist to Julia Parmly, this small sketch for several larger finished canvases has recently figured prominently in art historical discourses on the origins of Luminism. In the absence of any known drawing for the scene, Earl Powell has conjectured that the Billingses' oil sketch may have been executed on site, out-of-doors; would of necessity date from 1853; and would have served as the pictorial source for the better known canvases, dated between 1856 and 1860, that are now in various public and private collections.⁵⁰⁶

While the father of the purportedly indigenous American movement of Luminism is the Gloucester, Massachusetts painter Fitz Hugh Lane, John Frederick Kensett is considered one of the movement's earliest and most important practitioners. *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey* is not only Kensett's earliest dated Luminist composition, it is also his first marine painting affording the stylistic and compositional paradigm for his mature Luminist work.⁵⁰⁷ Luminism has been characterized as a chastened, abstemious mid-century aesthetic in which a distilled, silvery light serves as the dominant element of design. In these modest compositions, which contrast dramatically with the operatics of such Hudson River School painters as Cole, Church and Bierstadt, visual qualities of abstraction, balance, stillness, and reflection take precedence over picturesque form. Artistic self-effacement, effected through the elimination of painterly intercessions, displaces fluid and facile brushwork, which for the earlier generation of painters served as the signature presence of an artist in his canvas.⁵⁰⁸ The poetry of light as reflected in sky and water, intimacy of scale, and contemplative quietude are contrasted with the public and declamatory, the pictorial rhetoric of political boosterism often

associated with the Hudson River School. While it is unlikely that Frederick and Julia would have recognized these qualities in Kensett's artwork, they would have been responsive to its broader cultural spirit of reserve and decorum.

In her several studies of the Luminist movement, Barbara Novak has attempted to relate the style to the philosophical and religious imperatives of New England Transcendentalism. Emerson's metaphoric "transparent eyeball" is equated with the mirror-like finish of Luminist canvases, and the philosopher's erasure of the self ("All mean egoism vanishes. I am nothing. I see all. I am part and parcel of God") is imbricated with the artistic self-effacement apparent in Luminist brushwork ("the artist's labor trail"). Further evidence for this association is provided by the friendship between Curtis and Kensett. It was the former, close friend and publisher of Emerson, Dana, Lowell, Longfellow and other Boston literati, who first introduced Kensett to these celebrated writers, most of whom the artist knew socially.

Though small in size, *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey* looms large in the historical construction of mid-nineteenth century American landscape painting. Several writers attempting to interrogate the origins and meanings of the Luminist aesthetic have recognized this painting's paradigmatic role. In its creation of a compositional scheme based upon sky, water and shore, as illumined by a even-handed yet metaphorically charged veil of light, it is a fundamental example of the style.



Robert Crannell Minor (1839-1904), *The Vail of Kenneth—England, o.c.*, 29-1/2" x 49-1/2", c. 1872-1874.

Robert Crannell Minor, one of a host of Americans who joined the artist's colony at Barbizon during the 1860s and 1870s, was one of Frederick's and Julia's favorite painters. The inventory of the New York home lists four canvases by Minor, and Woodstock contains two, making him the most frequently represented artist in the Billingses' collections. The appeal of Minor's work lies in the gentle, bucolic nature of his landscapes, which often represent, in the Barbizon manner, grazing flocks of sheep or cattle in a lighted clearing, comfortably enframed by old growth trees. In Minor's idyllic, pastoral world it is always summer, a perpetual June without storms, mud, manure or insects. "Late-century urban men and women, subject to pressures and frustrations not entirely unlike our own," observes Lois Fink, "found escape in gazing at placid beasts contentedly munching beneath skies that were always sunny."⁵⁰⁹ This large canvas, presently located in the second story hallway, enjoyed pride of place in the parlor of the Woodstock mansion, having been sent expressly from New York to Vermont.⁵¹⁰

Minor, a native of New York City, went to Barbizon in the mid 1860s, where he took up residence for three years as a disciple of Narcisse Diaz. He subsequently spent two years painting in England and exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1872.⁵¹¹ Returning to New York in the 1870s, he opened a studio in Washington Square and

continued to paint in the Barbizon manner long after the American vogue for the style had disappeared. A critic for the American Art Association's annual exhibition in 1904 wrote of Minor's conservative allegiances:

His works have in them qualities of luminosity, depths of tone, and ripeness and vitality of color that carry one out of the domain of modern landscape back to the days when . . . Diaz, Dupré and Decamps were at their best. The secret of his power is that, like them, he feels nature as well as sees it, and paints it with heart as well as hand.⁵¹²

The frequency with which the Billingses collected Minor's works suggests that the paintings held special meaning for them. The gentle, pastoral vision embodied within Minor's paintings, the sense of settled agricultural and silvacultural permanence, doubtless served as visual paradigms and a source of inspiration for the farm and forest of the Woodstock estate. Though he generally painted smaller bucolic "cabinet pieces," *The Vail of Kenneth* is one of his most ambitious large-scale canvases. A second landscape by Minor in the Woodstock collection, entitled *The Close of Day*, is similar in lighting, coloration and handling of paint to *The Vail of Kenneth*. The principal distinction lies in the composition which, in lieu of opening at the center to allow for a distant vista (*coulisse*), features the heroic "centered-tree motif" favored by several of the Barbizon masters.



Edward Moran (1829-1901), *Clam Gatherers*, o.c., 25-1/4" x 39-1/2", c. 1875-1880.

The older brother of the celebrated western landscape artist, Thomas Moran, Edward has been consigned to relative historical oblivion.⁵¹³ In his own time he was considered one of the foremost, if not the foremost, American marine painter. According to one turn-of-the-century publication, he was "the greatest marine painter of the United States," a view that few today would support.⁵¹⁴

Clam Gatherers was probably painted sometime after 1877, when Moran visited France and the coast of Brittany to join the colony of American artists at Pont-Aven. In 1878 he executed *Rocs de Toqueville* (private collection), a work that bears a striking resemblance to *Clam Gatherers* in terms of composition, coloration and handling of paint.⁵¹⁵ The theme of fisher girls positioned against a low horizon and seacoast was popularized in the same year by John Singer Sargent, also resident in Brittany, when he exhibited *The Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* (The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D. C.) at the Paris Salon to great critical acclaim. A writer for the *New York Art Journal* in 1880 noted the connection:

His [Edward Moran's] recent visit to France has given the public a number of Normandy [sic] fisher-girls and women whose faces and figures commend them to favor. They belong to the same family that Mr. Sargent's maidens and matrons

in his *Fishing for Oysters at Cancale* are member of, although, of course, Mr. Moran's treatment is firmer and his drawing carried further.⁵¹⁶

Recognizing that Edward's somber palette and restrained brushwork were conservatively resistant to the coloristic influences of England's greatest marine painter and his American disciples, the anonymous critic further commented: "The 'Turnerism' which plays so brilliantly about the easel of Mr. Thomas Moran has never come within a league of his elder brother's studio."⁵¹⁷

Another well-known New York art critic Earl Shinn (Edward Strahan), however, denounced Moran in 1879 for "trying to forsake old 'Hudson River' methods." Reviewing a painting exhibited at the National Academy entitled *Normandy Shrimpers*, he observed: "The fancy of Mr. Edward [Moran] tying on the shoes of [Antoine] Vollon and Jules Breton, without any previous visits to the academic shops where the sandals of those trained figure-painters were fitted, is an inspiring spectacle of audacity."⁵¹⁸

The only painting in the Woodstock collection that displays, compositionally, an awareness of the newer aesthetic strategies of the Impressionists, *Clam Gatherers* exploits the dramatically low diagonal recession often favored by these artists. The emphasis upon the recession itself, states a recent historian,

the starkness of its length and breadth beneath spacious skies, and the lack of incident portrayed except for travelers on their way, appealed to new intellectual and aesthetic concerns. These images signified the act of going, the process of flux and change inherent in many late-century experiences, and associated with contemporary philosophical concerns of "becoming" as opposed to "being."⁵¹⁹

Although it is not generally recognized, it is likely that Edward Moran's scenes of women posed before a moody, atmospheric shoreline played a role in shaping Winslow Homer's 1880-1881 views of the north coast of England.

Along these same lines there is a marked relationship between Moran's 1884 watercolor of a small fishing boat in a stormy sea (Master Bedroom) and several oils and watercolors of the identical subject by Homer from approximately the same period. The exact nature of this relationship has yet to be established.



Edward Moran (1829-1901), *New York Harbor*, o.c., 17-1/4" x 35-1/4", 1872.

This painting probably documents the famous "America's Cup" yacht races held in New York Harbor and on Long Island Sound during the summer of 1872. Almost identical in style and composition to a painting in the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts entitled *The Livonia and Sappho* (1872), it possibly represents the New York Yacht Club's *Sappho*, which won two out of three races from Mr. James Asbury's British yacht *Livonia*.⁵²⁰

In likely conformity with John Ruskin's assertion that one of the most beautiful things in all of nature is the bow of a sailing vessel, Moran composed this work from an imaginary vantage in front of the two racing yachts.⁵²¹ Unlike the Peabody Museum painting, which shows *Livonia* and *Sappho* on a broad reach with jibs and spinnakers flying,

the Billingses' painting represents the two yachts tacking on a windward leg. The low vantage from which the scene is composed permits the artist to silhouette dramatically the full sails against a stormy sky. Moran's "America's Cup" series was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in the fall of 1872 to critical acclaim, and gained the artist admission to the status of Associate.



Peter Moran (1841-1914), *On the Trail in Idaho*, o.c., 5-1/2" x 13-1/4", 1879-1880.

During the summer of 1879 Peter Moran traveled, together with his more famous brother Thomas, throughout the American West.⁵²² Sponsored by the Union Pacific Railroad, the two brothers traveled by rail to California and on horseback to Utah and the Territories of Idaho and Wyoming. In late August they arrived at Fort Hall in Idaho Territory and, accompanied by twenty troopers of the U. S. Infantry, set out for Jackson Hole and the sight of the Grand Tetons, one of whose peaks had been named after Thomas in honor of his services to the Hayden Survey of the Yellowstone.⁵²³ Due to the recent Bannock-Paiute war (1878) the expedition was not without risk to the two artists. After making pencil sketches along the Snake River and in Jackson Hole, the two brothers rejoined the Union Pacific line at Green River, Wyoming, where they made further sketches including some of the most important in Thomas' career.⁵²⁴

On the Trail in Idaho is most assuredly a product of this expedition. The painting is related in composition, though not in style, to a body of over forty paintings of the Green

River executed by Thomas Moran throughout his life. In these popular paintings, several of which were purchased by the Union Pacific, Thomas depicts the sandstone buttes of the region as the scenic backdrop to a caravan of Indians winding their way towards a distant cluster of tepees.⁵²⁵ Even though Green River City was the site of a major depot of the Union Pacific, Thomas erased all evidence of bridges, rail-lines, smelters or telegraph poles, as seen, for example, in the contemporaneous photographs of Andrew Joseph Russell and William Henry Jackson.⁵²⁶ In much the same spirit Peter revises his brother's scheme through the use of a variant perspective in which the mounted Indians proceed in an extended file directly towards the viewer rather than moving into the space of the canvas. This aggressive composition was popularized in the early nineteenth century by French artists depicting military subjects and, more relevantly to our concern, by painters of Orientalist themes.⁵²⁷

In *On the Trail in Idaho*, Peter Moran conflates two traditions of representation in order to produce a narrative that works on several levels at once. In the first instance Moran's primordial, pre-industrial landscape, inhabited only by Indians and from which is excised any reference to the existence of the railroad, assured viewers that the "grandeur of the West had not been compromised by the advent of technological progress."⁵²⁸ His second purpose was to associate the American Indian with the exotic inhabitants of North Africa. As both a conceptual and a formal strategy, the "Orientalizing" of the American Indian was begun in the early nineteenth century by artists like Alfred Jacob Miller who, as an admirer of French painter Eugene Delacroix, transformed Plains warriors into the aesthetic equivalents of Bedouin horsemen.⁵²⁹ The Romantic period's joint fascination with the Far West and the Near East is evident in the Billings Collection, given the existence of both

Orientalist paintings and western landscapes.⁵³⁰ *On the Trail in Idaho* and William Keith's *Mount Hood from Sandy River*, however, are the only canvases that feature the presence of Indians, a subject never close to the heart of Frederick Billings. If, as is often asserted, the underlying presumption of both Orientalism and painting of the American West is that colonialism and Manifest Destiny were justified as a civilizing and modernizing force, then *On the Trail in Idaho* doubtless spoke meaningfully to Frederick Billings.

Best known for his graphic art and his foundational role in the establishment of the Philadelphia Society of Etchers (1880), Peter Moran painted numerous views of the western landscape including *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone with Artists* (private collection), a work celebrating the union of art and enterprise in the appreciation of the American landscape. In 1881, Peter Moran was commended by art critic S. G. W. Benjamin for his role in preserving on canvas aspects of an America thought to be disappearing:

Catlin long ago pointed out the real direction for our figure painters to follow: but, instead of seeing the magnificent subjects presented to them, our artists have gone to Europe and devoted their attention to Italian, French, and German peasantry. . . . Many of the noble scenes which were to be found on this continent have vanished before the march of civilization. A few yet remain, such as Mr. Moran has represented. Now is the time to paint them.⁵³¹



James Craig Nicoll (1847-1918), *Maine Coast on a Summer Afternoon*, o.c., 23-1/2" x 39-1/2", 1878.

Very little is known about James Craig Nicoll except that he was the longest tenant (1870-1918) of New York City's famed Tenth Street Studio Building.⁵³² During his lengthy tenancy he came to know almost every important American artist of the period including Church, Bierstadt, Homer and Chase.

He was also a founding member of the American Society of Painters in Watercolor (along with Homer) and served for several years as its president. He exhibited at the 1878 Paris Exposition and, according to an anonymous critic, was "the doyen of American marine painting. He is a familiar figure in the art life of New York. His pictures have much feeling and rare, good sentiment and are always deservedly popular."⁵³³ Beyond this brief notice, it is not known if he studied in Europe or where he studied.

Maine Coast on a Summer Afternoon, signed and dated 1878, is painted in the American "realist" style of the 1870s. The subject of solitary women posed before a pounding surf came into vogue during the years immediately after the Civil War. Whether understood as symbolic of bereavement for sons and lovers lost in battle or "an escape from the consequences of war and the transformation of the United States . . . into an urbanized, industrialized nation," the figure by the sea began to appear in paintings by Sanford Gifford, John F. Kensett, Eastman Johnson and, most famously, Winslow Homer.⁵³⁴ As distant relatives of

the gay and fashionable seaside tourists of French painting, the American protagonist projects a more alienated aura. In the Billingses' canvas the influence of Homer is perceptible in the parasoled woman posed near the seashore and in the greenish iridescence of the breaking waves. Minor's fashionably garbed figure, however, does not stand upright binding the sea to the horizontals of shore and sky. Rather than serving as a vertical bulwark against the starkness of the sea, as in Homer, the woman stoops to commune with nature and the land. In further contrast with Homer, Nicoll displays no awareness of French Impressionism, clinging instead to traditionally conservative modes of lighting, coloration and facture.



George H. Smillie (1840-1921), *On the Hudson*, o.c., 8-1/2" x 6-1/2," and *Mountainous Landscape*, o.c., 8-1/2" x 6-1/2", c.1870-1880.

These identically framed, cabinet-sized landscapes were meant to be read as pendants. Typically combined by Hudson River School artists in a single composition, these discrete views of uplands and lowlands discourse with one another about the formal and ideational meanings of the national landscape. Representing the fundamental polarities of American nature: water and land, erosion and uplift, effect and cause, the Hudson and the Adirondacks, they embody diverse meanings. To an informed viewer a scene of the Hudson River would have aroused historical, cultural and scientific associations, fluvial symbolism ranging from Dutch settlement, to America's first school of landscape painting, to New York city's water supply. In sympathetic accord, a view of New York State's north country Adirondack mountains might elicit concepts of origins and resources.⁵³⁵

Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School, poetically envisioned a similar conflation of the river and its mountain

source in a short lyric entitled *The Wild* (1826):

Friends of my heart, lovers of nature's
works,
Let me transport you to these wild,
blue mountains
That rear their summits near the
Hudson's wave;
Though not the loftiest that begirt the
land
They yet sublimely rise, on their
heights
Your soul may have a sweet foretaste
of heaven . . .

Painted in the conventional Hudson River School manner and employing a formulaic "Claudian" composition, the paintings are enclosed by identical semicircular frames.⁵³⁶ This framing device, a variant on the Renaissance "tondo," was employed to denote the quasi-religious nature of the subject, the American landscape. A formal expression of the cycle of eternity, the frames symbolize the timeless virtues of the American landscape. Smillie, a life-long member of the Hudson River School, shared the traditional theocratic belief in the sanctity of American nature. Together with his brother James D. Smillie, George was among a group of artists who summered regularly at Keene Valley in the Adirondacks. A height of land, located at the end of the valley, is still known as "Smillie's hill."⁵³⁷



Frank Waller (1842-1923), *Egyptian Life*,
o.c., 9-1/2" x 13-1/2", 1878.

One of the more intriguing Orientalist images in the Woodstock collection, this small painting was one of three of Waller's works (two in New York) owned by the Billingses, making him one of their most favored artists. Waller was an important figure in New York art circles and was a founder of the Art Students League, serving as its first president beginning in 1878. An academic Realist, he first went to Egypt in 1872 to sketch and gather materials for exhibition in his New York studio. A newspaper critic reported on the works in progress: "*Tombs of the Caliphs*, just outside Cairo, with the great desert in the background stretching far off into the perspective. Another interesting subject now on Mr. Waller's easel is *A Waterwheel on the Nile . . . a method . . . perhaps in use in the time of the Pharaohs.*"⁵³⁸



Fig. 17: Frederic A. Bridgman, *On the Road to Biskra* (1878), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

A related work is Frederick Arthur Bridgman's *On the Road to Biskra* (Fig. 17). This painting, which features a single camel with two drivers, is even more iconic than Waller's *Egyptian Life*, repressing all vestiges of anecdotal narrative in the interests of monumentalizing the animal. The best-known and most successful American Orientalist, Bridgman spent the years 1872 and 1873 in the Algerian city of Biskra, where he rented a studio in the poorest quarter of town. Prior to visiting Algeria, he had worked at the American art colony at Pont-Aven in Brittany and continued throughout his long career to create images of Breton peasants alongside his more celebrated paintings of bedouins.⁵³⁹ A further confirmation of the Victorian penchant for exoticism is a statement made by the artist when French troops were withdrawn from Algeria during the Franco-Prussian war and a native insurrection ensued. Bridgman was appalled at the "ungrateful" behavior of the Algerians, reflecting upon "the perfidy and cruelty of the natives which remind one forcibly of what the Puritans and the early settlers westward-bound in the United States had to endure in their battles for territory against the treacherous Indians."⁵⁴⁰ Such imperialist sentiments concerning the conquered and colonized were held by most Victorians. More concerned with shoring up western myths about the Near East than exploring the realities of social and political experience, these Orientalist images were a staple of most high Victorian collections.

A third painting in the Woodstock collection that prominently features camels is Samuel Colman's *Arab Caravansary* of 1879 (Fig. 18). The presence of this work in the collection indicates that Frederick and Julia had more than a casual interest in the subject. Colman was another artist favored by the Billingses and, according to the inventory of the New York collection, his paintings of desert Bedouin were hung

alongside images of Breton peasants. An anonymous writer for *Appleton's Journal* in 1875 reported on a visit to Colman's Manhattan studio:

The largest and most important class of his works were painted in Africa, in which country he penetrated into strange and remote regions, quite apart from the ordinary track of tourists and even of artists. Some of his most interesting paintings are of Moorish ruins of mosques, with their beautiful towers and horseshoe arches, at Tlemsen and Mansoria in Algeria on the border of Morocco, quite remote from the sea. . . . Mr. Colman has brought back with him sketches taken on the borders of the desert. . . . Bands of Arabs, with horses, camels and the usual paraphernalia of the caravan, appear also, painted with fidelity and with the mature precision of an artist of great experience in the use of color.⁵⁴¹



Fig. 18: Samuel Colman, *Arab Caravanary* (1879), Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Endnotes

³⁷¹ The pencil sketch upon which the Billingses' painting is based is illustrated in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), fig. 155.

³⁷² See Ludlow.

³⁷³ Ludlow, 412. Frederick Billings' first experience of the Yosemite was through the photographs of Watkins. See Winks.

³⁷⁴ For a sampling of the critical reception to this work see Anderson and Ferber, 200–201.

³⁷⁵ Hendricks, figs. 154, 156. Anderson and Ferber, fig. 61.

³⁷⁶ Ludlow, 444.

³⁷⁷ Gordon Hendricks, 221, cites the diary of Esther Osborne, sister-in-law of the artist: "Saturday afternoons it was the fashion for the gay, fashionable world of San Francisco to drive and ride a cheval to the Cliff house where we danced, sat on the veranda, watched the seals on "Seal Rocks," drank lemonades, flirted, listened to the band etc. Albert used to take us all every Saturday afternoon. He drove handsome horses and a light open carriage."

³⁷⁸ For representative examples of these marines see Anderson and Ferber, figs. 63–64.

³⁷⁹ Anderson and Ferber, fig. 14.

³⁸⁰ For an account of the role of the Catskill Mountain House in fostering the early Romantic cult of "wilderness" see Roland Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1966).

³⁸¹ Another way of stating this geo-cultural trajectory would be to draw a line from Berkeley Rock, Newport, Rhode Island to the University of California at Berkeley. Appropriately enough it was Frederick Billings who suggested the name Berkeley, honoring the author of the poem "Westward the Course of Empire," for the site of the University of California.

³⁸² Hendricks, CL 143, CL 172, CL 234.

³⁸³ Hendricks, CL 172.

³⁸⁴ See Hendricks, CL 105 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts), CL 114 (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University) and CL 184 (Reynolda House, Winston-Salem, North Carolina) and Anderson and Ferber, fig. 48 (National Museum of American Art, Washington D. C.), fig. 52 (Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas). These works are variously dated between 1866 and 1870.

³⁸⁵ Hendricks, CL 260.

³⁸⁶ Hendricks, 268.

³⁸⁷ For Bierstadt's series of canonic views of Yosemite painted between 1864 and 1868 see Anderson and Ferber, figs. 41–47.

³⁸⁸ Anderson and Ferber, 200, provide a sampling of contemporaneous criticism. Mark Twain's famous observation that Bierstadt's Yosemite is "more the atmosphere of Kingdom-Come than California" is quoted in Robertson, 23.

³⁸⁹ James Jackson Jarves, *The Art-Idea* (1864), quoted in John Wilmerding, ed., *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875*, Exhibition Catalogue (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 15.

³⁹⁰ An anonymous writer in the journal *The Art Amateur*, "Art in San Francisco" (Sept. 10, 1879), wrote:

Most of our artists have returned from their summer sketching tours, and are busy at their easels working up the result of these visits to Nature. William Bradford spent some time in the Yosemite Valley, and has proven to his friends' satisfaction that, though a marine painter by choice, he can see with an artist's eye, and render with an artist's hand, the glories of cliff and grassy slope. He is at work on two views of the great valley, both of them being orders from a New York banker.

He goes on to state:

Art thrives best in a community containing a leisure class; and as yet such a class cannot be said to exist in San Francisco. The great fortune makers, such as the bonanza kings, the railroad magnates, the land-monopolists, and the successful stock brokers have accumulated their money so recently that they are not sufficiently accustomed to the novelty to treat themselves to any rest or enjoyment of the fruits of their labor.

³⁹¹ Anderson and Ferber, 87. Compare with William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1986), 166:

Bierstadt and the other painters of the Yosemite, as well as the cadre of accomplished photographers, succeeded in turning Yosemite into a sacred space in the American cult of naturalism. The painters had created transcendental vistas, and near-mythical sunsets; the photographers had monumentalized and framed the individual landmarks and

views. For Americans and European visitors, in quest of scenic and unspoiled nature, Yosemite became a haven, the successor to Niagara Falls as the favored place to confront Nature's power.

³⁹² *Overland Monthly* (August 1875); *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sept. 15, 1878; August 3, 1879; April 25, 1880).

³⁹³ *The Art Amateur* 5 (November, 1881), 115–116. Another journal, *The Philadelphia Photographer*, October, 1883, 7, reports: "He is what may be called a truthful painter, following nature conscientiously, adorning her, or changing her but little, except where her arrangements do not suit the limits of the canvas" (quoted in Anderson and Ferber, 287).

³⁹⁴ Clarence Cook, *New Path* (1864), quoted in Ferber and Gerds, 23. Here we are reminded of Clarence King's famous diatribe against Bierstadt in *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1872), 207.

³⁹⁵ *The Philadelphia Photographer*, October, 1883, 8, reports: "Mr. Bradford is not only a splendid painter but an enthusiastic photographer. He was one of the first painters to perceive the value of photography as a helper to the painter" (quoted in Anderson and Ferber, 288).

³⁹⁶ See Wilmerding, *American Light*, 131 for a short discussion of Bricher's reliance on Kensett. For a more general account of the artist's career see Jeffrey R. Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher* (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973).

³⁹⁷ Wilmerding, *American Light*, 131.

³⁹⁸ See Gifford's *October in the Catskills* (Los Angeles County Museum) in Weiss, 321.

³⁹⁹ Weiss, 13–20.

⁴⁰⁰ There is no monograph on Casilear and he is only marginally included in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's encyclopedic 1988 exhibition. See Howat, 142–144.

⁴⁰¹ Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (1867; reprint, New York: James E. Carr, 1966), 521.

⁴⁰² For the shift in sensibility leading to the Barbizon aesthetic see Burke and Voorsanger in Howat, *American Paradise*, 71–90. A typical critique of the American style was written in 1879 by S. G. W. Benjamin:

If there has been a fault in this school of American landscape art, it has been, perhaps, in endeavoring to get too much in a picture, in

trying to be too literal; so that the great attention given to the details had excited wonder rather than stimulated the imagination, and had marred the impression of general effect which should be the chief idea in a work of art (Howat, 73).

Frederick and Julia appear to have been unaware of these critical debates, mixing Hudson River School works and Barbizon-inspired paintings freely in their collection.

⁴⁰³ Burke and Voorsanger in Howat, 78.

⁴⁰⁴ For the context and meaning of French Barbizon painting see Herbert, 60–65. Théodore Rousseau, the most intellectual of the Barbizon group, was deeply concerned about the problem of deforestation of the Forest of Fontainebleau and fought a successful battle against loggers during the 1850's, an association that may not have been lost on Billings. "Everything I wanted to paint has been destroyed," lamented Daubigny in 1854, "trees cut down, no more water in the river, houses razed." Painting as a form of "salvage paradigm" was not unique to Americans.

⁴⁰⁵ Peter Moran of Philadelphia was among the leading practitioners of this genre.

⁴⁰⁶ The Comte de Nieuwerkerke, the head of official patronage for art during the Second Empire, is reported to have stated: "This is the painting of democrats, of those who don't change their linen and who want to put themselves above men of the world. This art displeases and disgusts me" (Bermingham, 13).

⁴⁰⁷ See Bermingham, 74–96 for the distinctions between French and American painters.

⁴⁰⁸ For Minor, see Bermingham, fig. 67.

⁴⁰⁹ See Janet Houghton's catalogue for a full citation of the text of the letter.

⁴¹⁰ *One Hundred Crowned Masterpieces*, n. d., clipping in New York Public Library Art File, Microfiche C309.

⁴¹¹ "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," *The Century*, September, 1885, 855. Clipping in the New York Public Library Art File, Microfiche C309.

⁴¹² In a letter to Asher B. Durand in which Cole sought the painter's assistance in persuading a patron, Thomas Hall Faile of New York, to commission a major canvas, he quoted a few lines to demonstrate the pictorial qualities of the poem:

Oh! ever in my waking dreams
I dwell upon that happy hour

When midway on the mount I sate
Beside the ruined tower.
The moonshine stealing over the scene
Had blended with the lights of even;
And she was there, my hope my joy,
My own dear Genevieve.

(Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* [Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1988], 202).

See fig. 168 for *Study for Genevieve* (private collection) and fig. 169 for the Billingses' *Citadel and Waterfall*.

⁴¹³ For the most part Cole's patrons and the critical establishment preferred his topographic landscapes based on recognizable American scenes to his poetic and allegorical images. A representative response appeared in the *New York Mirror* (2 June, 1838): "His Arcadias and other scenes from the imagination have not the originality and truth-telling force which his nature pictures have" (quoted in Parry, 204).

⁴¹⁴ In a letter to one of his most supportive patrons, Robert Gilmore of Baltimore (10 May 1835), Cole wrote: "I think that a vivid picture of any object in the mind's eye is worth a hundred finished sketches made on the spot—which are never more than half true—for the glare of light destroys the true effect of colour & the tones of Nature. . . . It [sketching] is in great measure a mere mechanical operation." On another occasion, he wrote Gilmore (25 Dec. 1826) concerning his artistic process of achieving a "higher landscape": "The most lovely and perfect parts of Nature may be brought together, and combined in a whole, that shall surpass in beauty and effect any picture painted from a single view. . . . He who would paint compositions, and not be false, must sit down amidst his sketches and combine them, and so have nature for every object that he paints" (Harvey, 30, 47).

⁴¹⁵ S. G. W. Benjamin, one of the more influential late nineteenth century historians of American art, wrote in 1880: "Bierstadt's smaller California scenes are generally more valuable than his large ones for artistic quality" (S. G. W. Benjamin, *Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch* [New York: Harper and Bros., 1880], 98).

⁴¹⁶ In terms of today's market value Cole landscapes have recently crossed the million dollar threshold. None of the other artists in the collection have attained this rarefied status. For a survey of the complex iconography of Niagara Falls see Elizabeth McKinsey, *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985). The Billingses' painting is referenced in a footnote (208) as "attributed to Thomas Cole."

- ⁴¹⁷ For an illustration see Parry, fig. 74. The Billingses' painting is reproduced as fig. 76 from a private collection.
- ⁴¹⁸ McKinsey, 202.
- ⁴¹⁹ See Parry, fig. 75.
- ⁴²⁰ Parry, 101.
- ⁴²¹ These letters, currently preserved at Olana, are quoted in full in Janet Houghton's catalogue.
- ⁴²² McKinsey, 202.
- ⁴²³ In 1871 Henry James described Niagara as "choked in the horribly vulgar shops and booths and catchpenny artifacts which have pushed and elbowed to within the very spray of the Falls . . . to ply their importunities in shrill competition with its thunder" (Goetzmann and Goetzmann, 167).
- ⁴²⁴ The canonic study of this theme is Susan Danly and Leo Marx, ed., *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988).
- ⁴²⁵ "Since the sixteenth century, that ideal—a world in which natural order predominates over complex changes—had suited the industrialists and landowners by belittling the undesirable effects of progress: cities, trains, and nature under cultivation appear romantic, controlled and insignificant. . . . Progress, under divine Providence, would be absorbed and purified by the nation's unsullied environment" (Howat, 212).
- ⁴²⁶ *Nelsons' Guide to Lake George and Lake Champlain* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1858), 44–45. In 1998 petitions to the Commissioner of Parks caused the bridge to be studied for reopening to the public. It had been closed in 1970 when a rock thrown from the bridge killed a passenger on a tourist boat. It is estimated that it will cost \$6,000,000 to reopen the bridge to pedestrian traffic.
- ⁴²⁷ Cf. Thomas Cole's numerous views of Roman aqueducts in Parry, plates 7, 8.
- ⁴²⁸ E. P. Richardson and Otto Wittmann, Jr., *Travelers in Arcadia: American Artists in Italy 1830–1875* (Detroit Institute of Arts, 1951), 33.
- ⁴²⁹ Danly and Marx, 198.
- ⁴³⁰ For Ernest Lawson's numerous paintings of the bridge see Adeline Lee Karpisak, *Ernest Lawson: A Retrospective Exhibition of His Paintings* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Museum of Art, 1979). For Luks see Elizabeth Milroy, *Painters of a New Century: The Eight and American Art* (Milwaukee: Art Museum, 1991).
- ⁴³¹ Hill's watercolor was exhibited at the American Art Union in 1848.
- ⁴³² Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 483.
- ⁴³³ David Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy* (Phoenix Art Museum, 1982), dates the interest in the French coastline from Whistler's visit to Concarneau in 1861. He cites Dana, along with Kensett and Casilear, as earlier, "incidental" visitors.
- ⁴³⁴ Fink, 204.
- ⁴³⁵ For the role of the Hudson River in the cultural life of mid-century America see Sandra S. Phillips, *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and their Houses, Studios, and Vistas* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1988). For compositions nearly identical to the Billingses' painting see Plate 4–5, 31.
- ⁴³⁶ For an account of the mid-century Knickerbocker challenge to Boston's traditional cultural primacy see Weiss, 21–22 and Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 65–105.
- ⁴³⁷ The rivalry between Billings and Henry Villard appears in retrospect to provide a reinscription of these antagonisms. The Knickerbocker poet Bayard Taylor described New Englanders as "a tribe of Schoolmasters and Preachers." John Durand, son of the artist, in reminiscing about the members of New York's Century Club, wrote:
- In New England, the metaphysical basis of morality is total abstinence, and a suppression of the emotions; in the Century it is temperance in all things, and a liberal construction of emotional impulses. In New England, where the emotions are more talked about than felt, they are, as far as practical life goes, held in ideal solution; in New York, where people are too busy to meditate, and the racial stock is more complex, the emotions have more natural play and are held to be living realities (John Durand, *Prehistoric Notes of the Century Club* [New York: Century Club, 1882], 12).
- ⁴³⁸ For an account of mid-nineteenth century depictions of this event see Ann Uhry Abrams, "Democracy, Regionalism and the Saga of Major Andre," in Patricia M. Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, *Redefining American History Painting* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 54–63.
- ⁴³⁹ The locus classicus for the doctrine of associationism was the writings of the English theorist Archibald Alison, whose *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* was first published in 1790. For Alison's influence on American culture see

Stein, *John Ruskin*.

⁴⁴⁰ For a representative example of the allegorizing of nature see the celebrated essay by the Reverend Elias Magoon, "Scenery and the Mind."

⁴⁴¹ See Phillips, plates 30–33 for the still extant Rossiter House at Cold Spring.

⁴⁴² See Miller, *Empire*, 82 for a discussion of the picturesque formula based on the paintings of French artist Claude Lorraine (1600–1682), the most influential landscape paradigm in the history of western art.

⁴⁴³ For these developments see McGrath and MacAdam.

⁴⁴⁴ The Billingses' painting is closely related in style, theme and composition to a nearly identical work in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, signed and dated 1847. See David B. Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: A Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978), nr. 121, fig. 60.

⁴⁴⁵ For a thorough discussion of this painting see Angela Miller, *Empire*, 190–193 and plate 6.

⁴⁴⁶ Angela Miller, *Empire*, 176.

⁴⁴⁷ William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920* (Washington D. C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 29.

⁴⁴⁸ The passage illustrated by Ehninger reads:

Led by a cord that was tied to an iron ring
in its nostrils,
Covered with crimson cloth, and a cushion
placed for a saddle.
She should not walk, he said, through the
dust and heat of the noonday;
Nay, she should ride like a queen, not plod
along like a peasant . . .
"Nothing is wanting now," he said with a
smile, "but the distaff;
Then you would be in truth my queen, my
beautiful Bertha!"

While it is tempting, within the hermeneutics of post-modernism, to associate the "snow-white bull" with the myth of the Rape of Europa, contemporaneous critics were more concerned with the historic lack of cattle at Plymouth than with neo-classical allegories. The critic Francis H. Underwood, for example, writing in 1882 in defense of artistic license, noted à propos of the bull: "If carping antiquarians query, and say that the Mayflower brought no cattle, and that there was not a steer in the Plymouth Colony, white, red, or brindle, that is so much

the worse for them. Longfellow knew, as we all know, that the story ought to be true, and so he has given it" (Francis H. Underwood, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Biographical Sketch* [Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882], 192).

⁴⁴⁹ William H. Gerds and Mark Thistlewaite, *Grand Illusions: History Painting in America* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1988), 161.

⁴⁵⁰ According to David Tatham:

As artifacts of an interrelationship forged among the poetic, dramatic and pictorial arts in mid-nineteenth century America the "Mazeppa," "Hiawatha," and "Enoch Arden" series [of Currier & Ives prints] had no real equivalents in the present century. The prints are the product of an era when the reading of poetry was an everyday activity for many people, the major poets were celebrated figures, and the poems themselves reverberated in popular thought (David Tatham, "Poetry, the Stage, and Currier & Ives," *The American Art Journal* 24 [1992], 105).

⁴⁵¹ A favorite painting in the New York collection (currently in the private collection of a descendent of the Billingses in Woodstock, Vermont) was the *Return of the Mayflower* by George H. Boughton (1833–1905). Mansion files contain copies of a newspaper account of the auction at which Frederick paid \$3,500 for this painting of a young Pilgrim couple (Priscilla and John Alden) watching from the shore as "The Mayflower" sails back to England. Depicted as exiles, the Pilgrim theme was inspired by Longfellow's poem and, perhaps, by the increasing immigrant presence in the United States. In the words of a recent historian:

Rather than emphasizing the triumph of escape from the religious repression of the Old World, Boughton's paintings portray the pathos of a people voluntarily cut off from their homeland. That this couple is intended to represent John and Priscilla seems obvious, but it is typical of Boughton that he places the Pilgrims in small, isolated groups, in contrast to the massed body of the Mayflower passengers used in most depictions of the Landing, thereby enhancing the idea of exile, emphasizing separation rather than Separatism (John Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998], 381).

Frederick later bought two engravings of the subject, signed by Boughton and recommended by art dealer Frederick Keppel who aptly observed: "You may well be proud of the possession of this lovely painting. I think it has more of the New England spirit in it than any other picture in the world."

Boughton's imagery, like that of Ehninger, was doubtless inspired by verses from *The Courtship of Miles Standish*: "Then from their houses in haste came forth the Pilgrims of Plymouth/Men and women and children, all hurrying down to the sea-shore/Eager, with tearful eyes, to say farewell to the May Flower/Homeward bound o'er the sea and leaving them here in the desert."

⁴⁵² See Truettner, *West as America*, 55–95.

⁴⁵³ See Joshua C. Taylor, 143–150 for the role of Bingham's painting in the construction of Manifest Destiny.

⁴⁵⁴ The merging of promotional and biblical rhetoric for westward expansion can be found in several books in the Billingses' library. A characteristic example is found in C. W. Dana's *The Garden of the World, or the Great West: Its Wealth, Its Natural Advantages, and Its Future. Also, Comprising a Complete Guide to Emigrants, with a Full Description of the Different Routes from Hon. Thomas H. Benton, Hon. Sam Houston, Col. John C. Fremont, and Other Old Settlers* (Boston: Westworth, 1856), 13: "The Land of Promise and the Canaan of our time, is the region which, commencing on the slope of the Alleghanies, broadens grandly over the vast prairies and mighty rivers, over queenly lakes and lofty mountains, until the ebb and flow of the Pacific tide kisses the golden shores of the El Dorado."

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Cindy Dickinson, "Creating a World of Books, Friends and Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825–1860," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31 (1996), 53.

⁴⁵⁶ Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from his Journals and Correspondence*, Vol. 2 (Boston, Ticknor & Co. 1886), 327. The entry for November 6: "I gave a dinner to Ticknor and Fields, the publishers, in honor of the success of Miles Standish; the other guests, T. Starr King and Whipple."

⁴⁵⁷ John Wilmerding writes:

Jerome Elwell . . . copied one of Lane's paintings of Gloucester to be hung in the city hall. The original was burned when fire burned the hall after Lane's death, and the Elwell copy, exact in its reproduction, now hangs in the Sawyer Free Library at Gloucester. Another copy, undated but signed by Elwell and viewing Norman's Woe and Ten Pound Island from Rocky Neck, is rough and unpolished in parts and lacks Lane's professional touches and detail. Of Elwell himself there is little information except a brief informal biography by Helen Mansfield. She remarks that Elwell had refined tastes, enjoyed poetry, was deeply interested in

art, and doubtless saw all that he could of Lane. Although there is no proof of direct instruction from the older and more accomplished artist, Elwell evidently gleaned much from Lane's marines (John Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane: American Marine Painter* [Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1964], 26).

⁴⁵⁸ Hans Vollmer, ed., *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler* (Leipzig: Seeman Verlag, 1953–1962), Vol. 10.

⁴⁵⁹ For information on Frère see Clara Erskine Clement and Laurence Hutton, *Artists of the Nineteenth Century and their Works: A Handbook* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1885), 272–273.

⁴⁶⁰ Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* two decades ago, it has become the academic fashion to label all forms of literary and artistic Orientalism as depictions of backwardness, decay, barbarism and Near Eastern violence and misgovernment, thus opening a pathway for European colonial intervention. Though Frederick Billings may have shared these views to some extent, especially with regard to the exploitation of American Indians, it is unlikely that he viewed his Orientalist paintings as Imperialist tracts.

⁴⁶¹ Valued at \$5,000 according to the inventory of the Madison Avenue home, a top valuation shared only by works by Bouguereau, Troyon, and Meyer Von Bremen (*The Pious Mother*, currently in the Taylor Collection).

⁴⁶² The Thompson House at 283 Madison Avenue (now demolished) is described and illustrated in the great Gilded Age compendium of opulent homes: *Artistic Houses: Being Interior Views of a Number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States with a Description of the Art Treasures Contained Therein* (New York, Benjamin Blom 1883, reprint 1971). Thompson's version of Venice is illustrated as an overmantel for the drawing room (see page 48). The Billingses' New York home at 279 Madison Avenue is not represented among the great houses.

⁴⁶³ Weiss, 275 and 280.

⁴⁶⁴ Harvey, 59.

⁴⁶⁵ See Weiss, 126 for a quote from another letter: "The richly colored sails of the Venetian and Chioggian fishing boats have interested me a good deal from the striking contrasts of color they afford with the sky and water." On another occasion, when faced with a request to paint yet another Venetian scene, Gifford reluctantly agreed to consult his sketchbook to see if "perhaps something more may come out of them—but of that I am not confident"

(Letter to John F. Weir, 6 May, 1875, quoted in Weiss, 144).

⁴⁶⁶ The definitive formulation of Luminism is found in Wilmerding, *American Light*.

⁴⁶⁷ In a letter to a friend, quoted in Margaretta M. Lovell, *Venice: The American View 1860–1920*, Exhibition Catalogue (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1984), 40, Gifford stated: “I have made a few sketches about Venice, from some of which I may make pictures.” Judging from the number of paintings made on the subject of sailboats in the Lagoon, one famous example of which was owned by John Jacob Astor, Gifford frequently recycled the theme during the 1870s.

⁴⁶⁸ Lovell, 39.

⁴⁶⁹ Ormond, 170.

⁴⁷⁰ Ormond, 170–171.

⁴⁷¹ For the Keene Valley artists see Mandel, *Fair Wilderness*, 20–21.

⁴⁷² For a survey of the theme see Roger B. Stein, *Seascape*, Chapter 4: “In Pursuit of the Romantic Sublime.”

⁴⁷³ For the Dutch convention see J. Richard Judson, “Marine Symbols of Salvation in the Sixteenth Century,” *Marysas*, Supplement 1 (1964), 136–152. For the American symbol of the “Shipwreck of State” *inter alia* John Wilmerding, *American Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 97.

⁴⁷⁴ Winslow Homer’s *The Life Line* of 1884 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) is one of the last great statements of this theme in American art. Homer’s painting, however, is responding to personal Darwinian imperatives rather than older religious or political forces.

⁴⁷⁵ Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1969), xx.

⁴⁷⁶ John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 148. The *locus classicus* for this perceived shift of sensibility is Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962).

⁴⁷⁷ Sheldon, *American Painters*, 49.

⁴⁷⁸ The only monographic study of Johnson’s art is John I. H. Baur and Margaret C. Conrads, *Meditations on Nature: The Drawings of David Johnson* (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum of Westchester, 1987).

⁴⁷⁹ Though not an immediate member of the American Association, Johnson was, nonetheless, associated with their formal practices and ideological agenda. See Ferber and Gerdts.

⁴⁸⁰ Ferber and Gerdts, 11.

⁴⁸¹ James Fenimore Cooper, “American and European Scenery Compared,” in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: Or American Scenery, Art and Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), 69. Fifty years later Henry James renewed the *paragone* of Italy and America:

It is in a certain way unwise and even unkind to play this sort of game with the things of America and of Italy. . . . Lake George is quite enough like the Lake of Como to impel you . . . to pursue the likeness to its inevitable phase of unlikeness. The mountains which melt into those blue Italian waters are clad with olives and vines . . . with a verdure productive of a wholly different range of effects from that of the sombre forests of the North. And yet, such is the infinite mercy of the sun, its inscrutable cunning and power, that, today, as the morning light spent itself through the long hours over the sullen darkness of these American hills, it tempered and tinted and softened them, and wrought upon them such a sweet confusion of exquisite tones . . . that they seem to borrow their beauty from a southern air and to shine with that mild, iridescent, opaline glow which you enjoy from the little headland above Bellagio (Henry James, *Lake George to Burlington: Two American Travel Sketches* [1885; reprint, Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1981], 9–10).

⁴⁸² Howat, *American Paradise*, 275 for the Fuller study and 276 for the finished painting.

⁴⁸³ Baur and Conrads, figs. 36–39.

⁴⁸⁴ For American painters who did not have direct access to Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, Asher Durand, president of the National Academy of Design, transmitted his ideas in a series of “Letters on Landscape Painting” published in the art magazine *The Crayon* for 1855.

⁴⁸⁵ Eugen Neuhaus, *William Keith: The Man and the Artist* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1938), 56, claims that Keith learned glazing from George Inness, adding that “his excessive use of medium has turned many of his pictures prematurely dark.”

⁴⁸⁶ Keith met Inness in San Francisco in 1890 but had begun to emulate his Barbizon-inspired style as early as 1885, a probable date for the Billingses’ painting. John Muir, Keith’s long time friend and fellow traveler, referred to these paintings as “snuff-

brown," expressing disapproval for their lack of topographic clarity (Neuhaus, 56). Inness, reacting against the Romantic cult of wilderness, advocated painting more mundane aspects of nature. In his journal he noted: "The civilized landscape . . . I love it more and think it more worthy of reproduction than that which is savage and untamed. It is more significant" (quoted in George Inness, Jr., *Life, Art and Letters of George Inness* [New York: Century Association, 1917], 148). Though adopting his Tonalist style, and converting to Swedenborgianism under the influence of Inness, Keith did not abandon the panoramic view, which was still very much in vogue in the San Francisco art market. The dark, monochrome aesthetic of Tonalism denoted for Inness, and presumably for Keith as well, the presence of the spiritual in the world as over and against emanations of the material. Claiming that the purpose of a work of art was to arouse an emotion rather than to instruct, Inness opposed the didactic and moralizing imperatives of the earlier Romantics, especially those of the art critic John Ruskin.

⁴⁸⁷ For American Tonalism and related Barbizon inspired aesthetics see Birmingham. An anonymous reviewer in the Berkeley newsjournal *The Wasp* (July 20, 1907) defined Keith's putative modernity as a function of eyesight: "The famous painter has always been near-sighted and some art critics ascribe to that peculiarity his great power of depicting landscapes in a broad comprehensive style. Seeing distant objects en masse only, the artist has avoided the great fault of painting with lavish and photographic accuracy of detail" (quoted in Brother Cornelius Fidelis, *Keith: Old Master of California* [New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1942], 158).

⁴⁸⁸ Another strategy for accommodating the presence of technology in the western landscape, especially the railroad, was practiced by Bierstadt who, in painting a view of Donner Pass for Collis P. Huntington, president of the Central Pacific, made only oblique reference to the railroad tracks, thereby both marginalizing and assimilating the machine into the mythic wilderness. San Francisco art critics applauded this subterfuge, one commenting: "The railroad, with its enveloping snow-shed, is indicated plainly enough without any obtrusion of its ugliness"; another stated bluntly: "The hard fact of the railroad is only hinted by a puff of smoke, and by an unobtrusive sketch of the line of the snow sheds" (quoted in Anderson and Ferber, 85). William Keith also painted a view of Donner Pass in 1878 and with a characteristic erasure made no reference to the presence of the railroad, substituting instead a group of nomadic Indians. Neuhaus, 19. In dealing with the theme of the "machine in the garden," nineteenth century artists employed a full

gamut of pictorial strategies ranging from denial (Keith) to assimilation (Bierstadt) to celebration (Matteson) to lamentation (Russell). Of these Frederick Billings appears to have been comfortable only with the first.

⁴⁸⁹ The idea of the Indian as a noble "ruin" first emerges in the poetry of William Cullen Bryant and Washington Irving.

⁴⁹⁰ Cornelius, 94.

⁴⁹¹ A critic for the *New York Post* (17 February, 1865), in reviewing the exhibition, wrote of Bierstadt's *Mount Hood*: "Let us be thankful that Mr. Bierstadt has so successfully reproduced on his canvas the noble form of this king of mountains, and placing it before us, enables us through it to testify to the greatness and power of that Being who created it" (Anderson and Ferber, 85).

⁴⁹² For the meaning of Church's several views of Cotopaxi see Manthorne.

⁴⁹³ See Howat, 136 for Cole's famous canvas.

⁴⁹⁴ Anderson and Ferber, 85.

⁴⁹⁵ For the first ascent of Mount Hood by Joel Palmer in 1845 see Joel Palmer and John Palmer Spencer, *A Sight So Nobly Grand: Joel Palmer on Mount Hood in 1845* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1994), 21.

⁴⁹⁶ Palmquist, 45.

⁴⁹⁷ Cornelius, 94.

⁴⁹⁸ See Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, "The Last Summer's Work," in Driscoll and Howat, 137–161.

⁴⁹⁹ Driscoll and Howat, 138.

⁵⁰⁰ Driscoll and Howat, 141.

⁵⁰¹ For comparative purposes see Driscoll and Howat, plate 33 and fig. 79.

⁵⁰² Driscoll and Howat, 158.

⁵⁰³ For Ruskin's paramount influence on American culture see Stein, *John Ruskin*.

⁵⁰⁴ Janet Houghton, who has visited the site, asserts that it is the Navesink rather than the Shrewsbury River that is depicted. See her entry in the Catalogue of the Marsh-Billings Mansion Art Collection (1997).

⁵⁰⁵ The classic study of this style is John Wilmerding's *American Light*. The Billingses' painting was lent for this formidable six months' exhibition and reproduced as fig. 81.

- ⁵⁰⁶ Earl A. Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," in Wilmerding, *American Light*, 86–88. For the related Shrewsbury River paintings see Driscoll and Howat, frontispiece, fig 61, plates 17–19.
- ⁵⁰⁷ Powell states apropos of the Billingses' painting: "The refinement of this picture, in which nature has been reduced to cryptographic essentials of composition, is supreme."
- ⁵⁰⁸ For an eloquent and impassioned definition of Luminist aesthetics see chapter 5 of Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).
- ⁵⁰⁹ Fink, *American Art*, 225.
- ⁵¹⁰ Julia Billings' 1882 diary lists Minor's *Vale of Kenneth* along with Edward Moran's *Clam Gatherers*, Peter Moran's *On the Trail in Idaho* and a second painting by Minor as among their most important acquisitions of the year. Mansion Box A 12. Frederick Billings' diary entry for June 7, 1886 reads: "Sent Minor's *Vail of Kennett* to Woodstock," signifying its importance to him.
- ⁵¹¹ The principal source of information on Minor is Birmingham, 158.
- ⁵¹² *Bulletin of the American Art Association* (February 24–26, 1904). New York Public Library Art File, Microfiche M642.
- ⁵¹³ The principal study of Moran's art is Paul D. Schweizer, *Edward Moran: American Landscape and Marine Painter*, Exhibition Catalogue (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1979).
- ⁵¹⁴ Theodore E. Sutro, *Thirteen Chapters of American History Represented by the Edward Moran Series of Marine Paintings* (New York: Scribner & Co., 1905), 17. In contrast John Wilmerding, *A History of American Marine Painting* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 198 only mentions Edward Moran in passing as a student of Philadelphia painter James Hamilton.
- ⁵¹⁵ See Sellin, 180.
- ⁵¹⁶ *New York Art Journal* (1880), 273; New York Public Library Microfiche M 788. In her "Lists" Julia Billings entitled this work *Long Island Shore near Little Neck—Clam Gatherers*, a designation consistent with the practices of numerous American artists of the period who gave American inflections to European themes.
- ⁵¹⁷ *New York Art Journal*, 274.
- ⁵¹⁸ Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], "The Art Gallery: The National Academy of Design. First Notice," *Art Amateur* (June, 1879), quoted in Howat, 84.
- ⁵¹⁹ Fink, 231.
- ⁵²⁰ For a detailed account of the races and illustrations of Moran's "America's Cup" paintings see Schweizer, 36–40 and figs. 22–26.
- ⁵²¹ John Ruskin, *The Harbours of England in The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: Routledge, 1904), Vol. 13, 13–14.
- ⁵²² The only publication on the career of Philadelphia artist Peter Moran is an exhibition catalogue: Michael W. Schantz, *Peter Moran* (Philadelphia: Woodmere Art Museum, 1986). This publication provides an account of the artist's role in the 1890 Indian Census, a Federally sponsored documentation of the western tribes.
- ⁵²³ For an account of this expedition see Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 178–182. Thomas Moran's participation in the Hayden Survey of the Yellowstone in 1871 was sponsored by the Northern Pacific Railroad and underwritten by Jay Cooke who purchased sixteen watercolors from the artist.
- ⁵²⁴ See Anne Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 1856–1923* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996) for numerous reproductions of these drawings.
- ⁵²⁵ The best study of the Green River series is Nancy K. Anderson, "'The Kiss of Enterprise'" in Truettner, *The West as America*, 243–248.
- ⁵²⁶ See Truettner, *The West as America*, figs. 209–214.
- ⁵²⁷ An apt comparison is provided by Leon Belly's *Pilgrims Going to Mecca* (Paris, Musee d'Orsay, 1861). See Brian W. Dippie, *Looking at Russell* (Fort Worth, Amon Carter Museum, 1987), fig. 83. Dippie makes numerous connections between Orientalist paintings and the compositions of Charles M. Russell.
- ⁵²⁸ Anderson, "'The Kiss of Enterprise,'" in Truettner, *The West as America*, 248. From the available evidence Peter Moran's landscape backdrop for *On the Trail in Idaho* seems based on two discrete sets of drawings, one of the sandstone buttes of Green River, Wyoming and the other a view of Portneuf Canyon, Idaho. See Morand, *Thomas Moran*, plates 30 and 33.

⁵²⁹ See Dawn Glanz, *How the West Was Drawn: American Art and the Settling of the Frontier* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1978), 32 refers to Miller as the “Delacroix of the American West” in drawing attention to the Orientalist influence on the artist. Dippie, *Looking at Russell*, 84–88, makes similar claims for the painting of Charles M. Russell.

⁵³⁰ In this connection Charles Perkins Marsh’s concern for desertification and his ill-advised attempt to introduce camels into the desert Southwest is also relevant.

⁵³¹ S. G. W. Benjamin, “The Exhibitions—Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society,” *American Art Review* (1881), quoted in Schantz. The painting is also known by the title of *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone with Thomas Moran and Frederick Billings*. The Frederick Billings portrayed on canvas is a little known 19th century American artist, not the subject of this study.

⁵³² See Blaugrund.

⁵³³ New York Public Library Art File, Microfiche N115, undated, undocumented clipping for newspaper.

⁵³⁴ The principal study of the iconography of the sea is Stein, *Seascape*, 89.

⁵³⁵ For the role of the Adirondacks in the national imagination see Robert L. McGrath, *A Wild Sort of Beauty: Public Places and Private Visions* (Blue Mountain Lake, N. Y.: The Adirondack Museum, 1992).

⁵³⁶ For a discussion of the Hudson River School’s use of the “Claudian” formula see Novak, *American Painting*, 82.

⁵³⁷ Mandel, 108.

⁵³⁸ Quoted in Ackerman, 230. Frederick Billings’ interest in this painting of desert nomads is possibly related to George Perkins Marsh’s ill-fated attempt to introduce camels into the desert Southwest of the United States in May of 1856. A copy of Marsh’s book *The Camel: His Organization, Habits and Uses, Considered with Reference to his Introduction into the United States*, however, is not included in the mansion library.

⁵³⁹ The best source for Bridgman’s career is Ackerman, 20–32.

⁵⁴⁰ Ackerman, 22.

⁵⁴¹ Ackerman, 68. The full title of the Billingses’ picture is *Arab Caravansary, Tlemcen, Algeria*.

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