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THE ART EXPERIENCE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST FRONTIER

ART IN WISCONSIN

BY

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WISCONSIN CENTENNIAL ART EXHIBITION

THE PAINTER REPORTERS

Court House, all for the sum of one thousand dollars. Wimar worked indefatigably, barely completing the work before his death in 1862. He produced, as a result of his labors, an imitative blend of the two modes of mural painting current in Europe: the classical allegories of "Justice," "Solon," and "Mercury" and the descriptive realism of historical events advanced by Düsseldorf. In the approved Leutze manner he depicted "De Soto Discovering the Mississippi," "Laclede Landing at the Site of St. Louis," "Indian Attack on St. Louis," and "Westward the Star of Empire Takes Its Course," this latter in the very year, 1861, that Leutze was executing the same subject at Washington and setting a foundation stone for American mural painting. A European group, visiting the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, made a special trip to St. Louis to see the Wimar murals and found much to praise in them. Düsseldorf had done its work well.

To the simple factualism of the first painter reporters, Wimar adds the Düsseldorf regard for sentimental effect. We are invited to read meaning in the hard and polished form. And the dramatic and emotional effect, usually sought through a treatment of the eyes of animals and men to suggest terror or surprise, is sometimes almost ludicrous.

But, despite its technical insufficiencies, here was the mural tradition of Leutze, appearing on the frontier as early as Leutze's work itself in the Library of Congress, and a new art epoch had come. The Middle West could no longer remain aloof from the sweep of the art movements of the time, to nurture a native art of its own.

The style changes, but the attraction of the subject matter of Catlin's Indian West persists. Bierstadt joined General Lander's expedition to the Rockies in 1858, Kensett, Sanford Gifford, and Whittredge General Pope's foray in 1866; all brought back the West's spectacular scenery, seen through Düsseldorf's eyes. Weimar-trained Richard Lorenz and self-trained Frederic Remington ranged the plains in the eighties, reporting faithfully the cowboy and Indian genre but with sentiment and pseudo-drama. A corps of exponents of the Parisian academies idealized and lyricized the Indian about the same time. A whole school of Indian painters, fresh from Munich, formed at Taos, New Mexico, after 1900. And the procession is not yet at an end. Even in 1936 Winold Reiss, mural and portrait painter from Germany, was exhibiting huge poster portraits of the Northwest Indians, at Madison among other cities, and announcing his hope of painting the principal remaining Indian chiefs ere they vanish.

CHAPTER FOUR

PANORAMA SCENE PAINTING

A group of scene painters on the Middle West frontier in the forties continued the tradition of painting as reporting. If the Indian painters were news photographers of the new land, these men were the makers of moving picture travelogues. Their pictures did actually move, unrolling slowly between huge revolving spools, and were often accompanied by sound effects.

Middle West, in its early stage of occupation by white men, gave rise to realistic panorama on a gargantuan scale, and the interest in panoramas begun was a portentous event particularly in Wisconsin, for in its golden age in the eighties, as a battle subject, the panorama brought to Milwaukee a colony of trained European artists who were substantially to redirect the course of art in the state.

Landscape or scene painting of any kind was rare in America until the decades of the nineteenth century. Smibert is said to have painted an occasional landscape and Benjamin West, at the beginning of his career, painted one or two. Neither did the folk artists often turn their hands to the painting of scenes and the few examples that remain to us are topographical pictures, harbor views, and a still smaller number of original but crude mural paintings made anonymously on the walls of New England houses.¹ There was little demand for anything but portraits, and even in England the person more than nature was the accepted subject for art.

When scene painting did begin, the canvases were conceived in vast proportions, presumably to do justice to the size of the subject, and without thought of sale or decorative uses; the custom, prompted by the success of exhibiting large easel paintings of historic or religious subjects for an admission charge, was to take them on tour about the country for the entertainment and edification of a curious public.

The first record of a panorama painting, at least by an American artist, is that of Robert Fulton's, painted and exhibited in Paris shortly after 1786. It was the first panorama seen there, and its memory is still preserved in the name of the "Passage des Panoramas" where it was exhibited.²

In the early nineteenth century, according to Suzanne La Follette, the American public began to show interest in panoramas and large single pictures,³ paying admission fees to see them. Panoramas by J. M. W. Turner, 1810-1812, 57

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Fulton a pupil of Benjamin West, were exhibited in a special building called the Rotunda, for which the city of New York generously provided the land. This was probably the archetype of the circular buildings which became standard for displaying panoramas after the Civil War.

West gave a large canvas, "Christ Healing the Sick," to a Philadelphia hospital, and curious throngs paid for the privilege of viewing it, with large profits resulting for the hospital. West's son therefore brought his "Christ Rejected" from England to this country for exhibition. About 1815 a Swedish artist, Adolph Wertmuller, exhibited a large "Danae," which was accounted in a contemporary periodical as a splendid production but offensive to "pure taste and the morality of art."⁴

William Dunlap and Rembrandt Peale both travelled from town to town with large pictures or sent them out, as with Dunlap's copy of West's "Death on a Pale Horse," in the care of agents. Peale realized \$8,886 from showing his "Court of Death," and Henry Sargent made \$3,000 by exhibiting a huge picture of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and \$3,000 more by selling it.

The artists were not always successful, however. Dunlap often lost money and Samuel Morse sustained heavy losses on a painting of the House of Representatives which had required eighteen months of labor. The appeal of the pictures, when there was any, invariably was in the subject matter and never in the art merit. "Nothing but novelty," Dunlap complained, "attracts our people."⁵

If the reception of these large circulating pictures in one of the Middle West's chief centers, Milwaukee, be considered as an index, it becomes apparent that it was not so much novelty that the public wanted as something it could understand. And this was landscape.

In 1844 "Death on a Pale Horse," advertised as by Benjamin West, was exhibited with considerable fanfare in Milwaukee's Presbyterian Church. (This probably was Dunlap's copy from an outline engraving of West's work, since there is no record of West's original, done almost thirty years earlier (1817), going on tour at this time).⁶ The press announcement made a point of explaining carefully to the public what it was about to see:

"This sublime work of a great artist is now being exhibited in this city at the Presbyterian church . . . Some idea of the picture may be formed by reading the following from the St. Louis Transcript. It must be seen, however, to be appreciated.

"To appreciate the awful beauties of Scriptural conception, we should recollect

the artist is endeavoring to realize the poetical visionary inspiration of St. John, the Evangelist, during his exile to the Isle of Patmos, by the Pagan Roman Emperor, Domitian, on account of his uncompromising adherence to Christianity.

"All agree that the painting is graphically happy in the representation of death.

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The appalling physiognomy of the grim monster; the unrestrained fury of the Pale Horse, heightened by the wildly loose flowing mane—all strike the beholder with awe, while pity for the family group in vain would stay the hand of death.

"This painting is a genuine work of

West and was completed about the year 1800, embraces 40 figures on a surface more than 200 ft. of canvas. The subject altogether of the painting is eminently calculated to engross and heighten the moral faculties."⁷

Despite these painstaking advance preparations for public understanding, the Milwaukeeans did not give very substantial evidence of appreciation of the effort or concern for the improvement of their moral faculties and after two days, in which the endeavor to secure even a small number of spectators was unsuccessful, the canvas was rolled and taken away.⁸

"Christ Healing the Sick," declared also to be an original by West, was imported soon after, but this too was coldly received and remained but a short time. Thomas P. Rossiter's "The Return of the Dove to the Ark or the Triumph of Faith" and "Miriam, the Prophetess, Exulting over the Destruction of Pharaoh's Host" were next brought as a "Great Moral Exhibition"⁹ to the Abolition Church, with explanatory lectures, and school children were admitted for half price. The scenic subject matter was nearer the comprehension of the visitors and attendance increased. The children especially were enthusiastic and thought that it was something akin to magic that the effects of distance appeared on a perfectly flat surface. Noah and his salvation were not mentioned.

The first genuine panorama unrolled in Milwaukee was "The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise."

"The great feature of the moving scene was a green landscape and a very green tree, around which a monster serpent was twined. In the coil of its tail was an apple which was held toward the unregenerate

pair who were walking out of Paradise in full dress, Eve radiant in a pink gown, and Adam in silk hat and dress coat, carrying a cane. This extraordinary exhibition had however a run of but one night."¹⁰

Another "Panorama of Eden," an improvement on the first, was brought back later, advertised as

"Pratt's great original moving Panorama of Eden, with three groups of Adam and Eve, the size of life, in oil colors, and the Botany of the Globe, from the high latitudes to the tropics. Letters of recom-

mendation have been received . . . all pronouncing it the most magnificent panorama in the United States. The Panorama will commence moving at 7½ o'clock."¹¹

There was also about the same time "Blair's Mammoth Premium Panorama! the largest, most elegant and Instructive Series of Panoramic Paintings in the world, embracing Geological, Historical and Biblical Scenes, Views and

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Groupings of Life-Sized Figures on 170,000 Feet of Canvass, and finished at an expense of thirteen thousand dollars!"¹²

But again the public response was slim. The supposed religious interests of the early Americans still refused to make themselves manifest. It was the realistic treatment of the face of nature that intrigued them. As the Milwaukee *Sentinel* said of the "Panorama of Eden":

"The three groups of Adam and Eve are highly finished works of Art in drawing, coloring, and arrangement, but the charm of the panorama is the singular beauty of the different landscape scenes which it exhibits to the beholder, with every imaginable variety of foliage and flowers in the foreground, and otherwise properly placed.

The animals are so well treated, and in such excellent proportion to the rest of the picture, as to seem like life . . .

"The painting is the work of the finished artist, and the delineations of the plants and flowers have elicited the admiration of the best skilled botanists."¹³

Now came the first panorama of regional scenery, "The Mississippi River," possibly by Henry Lewis, and the startling and triumphant announcement that both sides of the river could be seen at one time.¹⁴ This Milwaukee hurried to see, keen to learn the nature of the river of which they had heard so much. With this success, similar scenic shows followed rapidly and became a matter of popular public interest.

In 1851 Milwaukee was treated to its first view of its own far West, as eastern cities only a few years before had been informed of the Mississippi Valley. This was Wilkin's Panorama of the trail to the Indian country of Oregon and California, properly attested by Major Thomas Fitzpatrick, guide in both Tremont's and Kearney's expeditions who had "for the last twenty-five years been well acquainted with the vast region of country lying west of the Mississippi."¹⁵

"All the prominent objects to be seen are clearly depicted on the canvas, and even the herbage is plainly to be seen—videlicet, the cactus and artemisia which abound on the way."¹⁶

"It offers a cheap and easy method of visiting Eldorado," said the Milwaukee *Sentinel*,¹⁷ thus Milwaukee followed the frontier,—through painting.

Then came "The Great National Panorama of the Hudson River and Views in Virginia, sketched and painted by the celebrated French artist, P. Grain, assisted by some of the first artists of Philadelphia;"¹⁸ "McEvoy's Grand Panoramas of Ireland and Niagara Falls . . . Each scene accompanied by vocal and Instrumental music on the piano, harp, violin, etc.,"¹⁹ and "Bullard's Panorama of New York . . . The Panorama continues to move before the spectator for nearly two hours . . . Over 700 horses and carriages, and 10,000 people of the city are represented at their daily business."²⁰

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Most popular of all were Hutching's "Panorama of the Mediterranean, embracing all the beautiful and interesting scenery upon the shores of the Old World, for nearly 4,000 miles,"²¹ and "The Panorama of Italy" showing figures in costume, street scenes, and historic buildings in Genoa, Milan, Pisa, Florence, Rome, Venice and Naples, and closing with an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. "It is by far the finest panorama which has ever visited us," said the newspaper accounts.²² Again people could see what they had read about and had no other means of seeing. The same panorama was brought back to Milwaukee several times and was always exhibited to good audiences,²³—demonstrating that our new Americans, isolated on the frontier and faced always with grim realities, were developing the same yearnings for the picturesqueness of foreign places that we know so well still characterizes our public art taste today.

These early panoramas were set on a stage and unrolled from one upright spool to another, creaking and groaning, amid interpretations by the commentator and often to the accompaniment of a melodian that contributed grotesque incongruities with the subject matter. Here, in all essential respects except for moving actors, was the antecedent of the moving picture, and the subsequent fervor of Americans for the movies makes these early panoramas seem all the more authentically American. Done though they were by untutored artists, they continued to be immensely more popular than easel painting, and constituted, in the simple directness, inventiveness, and vastness of their means of production and in the ready acceptance by the public, a genuinely native American folk art. The interest in panoramas did not lessen but on the contrary was enhanced when it became known that "real" artists produced them and the subject matter turned in the eighties to the landscape and action of the classic Civil War battles which were a by-word with every American.²⁴

The scenic panoramas of particular regions in colossal proportions appear to be indigenous to the Middle West in its frontier epoch. The general concept of their form and means of exploitation was furnished by Fulton and Vanderlyn, but no one before John Banvard and Henry Lewis, products of the middle border, had gone to a specific geographical location for his material.

Banvard, a New Yorker born in 1815 of French descendants, adventured after clerking in a drug store at Louisville, westward to New Harmony, Indiana, in 1836 where he conceived the idea of showing entertaining and instructive painted scenes to the settlements along the water courses to New Orleans—the progenitor, probably, of the "showboat" as well as the travelling

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scenic panorama. With three or four other young men he fitted up a crude flatboat with dioramic paintings, with which he had experimented as a youth, and started floating down the Wabash River toward St. Louis and New Orleans. Mishaps on the river sandbars, illness, and robbers beset their way. Provisions were quickly exhausted and they were glad to give their show for an admission charge of pumpkins and potatoes. Banvard sold out in New Orleans. But he was scarcely discouraged and was not to remain inactive long. Reading a statement in a foreign journal that "America has some of the most picturesque and magnificent scenery in the world, but there is no American artist adequate to the task of giving a correct and faithful representation of it,"²⁵ Banvard, self-taught as an artist, was stimulated to redeem his country's talent. Acting, reputedly, on a suggestion given him by Henry Lewis at St. Louis, he resolved to execute "Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River, painted on three miles of canvas, exhibiting a view of country 1200 miles in length, extending from the mouth of the Missouri River to the city of New Orleans, and to be by far the largest picture ever executed."²⁶

He started painting in the spring 1840 and spent four hundred days on the river. He returned then to Louisville, built a huge wooden building to work in, and finished covering his canvas, actually four hundred and forty yards long, in 1846. Accuracy of representation was as ever the watchword, and for this reason alone did he choose to do his painting in Louisville—to get testimonials of fidelity from river men, who in their turn gladly responded with letters of recommendation. Twenty-two captains and pilots certified to the "fidelity and truthfulness to nature" of the painting and the mayor of Louisville in turn attested that the rivermen were all practical navigators of the Mississippi and "gentlemen of veracity."²⁷ The Kentucky Historical Society awarded its diploma to him, "for the fidelity of your Painting."²⁸ A friend, visiting his studio at Louisville while the painting was in progress, likewise testifies to its astonishing life-likeness, and, incidentally, gives an inkling of the subjects treated:

"As a medium for the study of geography of this portion of our country, it will be of inestimable value. The manners and customs of the aborigines and the settlers—the modes of cultivating and harvesting the peculiar crops—cotton, sugar, tobacco, etc.—the shipping of the produce in all the variety of novel and curious conveyances employed on these rivers for transportation, are here so vividly portrayed, that but a slight stretch of the imagination would bring the noise of the puffing steamboats from the river and the songs of the negroes in the fields, in music to the ear, and one seems to inhale the very atmosphere before him."²⁹

It was the veracity of Banvard's painting in the first place that won him a hearing, when its size, its uniqueness, or its art could not. He faced every

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discouragement as he attempted his initial showing in Louisville. The gas company required a deposit of double the value of its fixtures; the city levied a tax. On the opening night not a single person attended and he received not a cent. The next day he distributed free tickets to the boatmen on the river, telling them that "it was their river he had painted." At night they came, with a few friends, and as one well-known scene after another passed before them, their enthusiasm reached a high pitch. "The boatmen told the citizens it was a grand affair; that it was correctly delineated and its accuracy could be relied upon. Finally the public became convinced that the picture was really worth looking at, and then they rushed to see it by hundreds."³⁰

The canvas was exhibited by unrolling it across a stage on two vertical revolving cylinders as the artist explained what was shown, adding a lyrical touch by reciting verses of his own making, notably one called the "White Fawn."³¹ After the first showing of a few weeks in Louisville, the panorama was sent East in December, 1846, and among other places shown to a fashionable audience at Boston in April, 1847. William Bradford, speaker of the house, Governor Briggs, and Mr. Calhoun, president of the senate, offered complimentary remarks at the gathering and the company passed a resolution paying tribute to Banvard's native American talent and his great service in bringing to them such accurate instruction concerning the Middle West:

"Resolved, That the immense extent of this picture, its truthfulness to Nature, as certified by those who are familiar with the view; its minuteness of detail; the wonderful illusion of its perspective, and the great variety of its scenery and objects, render it a useful medium for imparting correct information, respecting an interesting portion of our beautiful country."³²

"The idea of gain never entered his mind when he commenced the undertaking," it is said, "but he was actuated by a patriotic and honorable ambition, that America should produce the *largest painting* in the world."³³ Nevertheless, fortune came, and in seven months of exhibiting in Boston, he made fifty thousand dollars.

Banvard, encouraged by this result, took his panorama to London and showed it before the Queen, and then undertook another, starting the fashion of visiting the Holy Land for panoramic material. In 1850 he began his numerous pictures of the town of Jerusalem "painted from authentic drawings made upon the spot during an expensive journey, undertaken expressly for the work,"³⁴ returning to London for his first showing and thence to New York and New England.

Again he assured his public that all scenes were correctly delineated, and produced a facsimile of a testimonial by a native guide to that effect and a

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witness, in the person of the U. S. Consul at Beyrout, that the handwriting was actually the native's. Even the London papers took notice of this new note of accurate naturalism:

"Mr. Banvard has achieved a great triumph. He has cast aside the artificialities of art—the sickly conventionalities—the strainings after 'effect,' and 'color,' and esthetic composition; he has boldly struck out a new and untrodden path."³⁵

The successful reception of Banvard's panorama, and the fortune he made from it, prompted eager and tireless followers to ply their way up and down the Mississippi with sketch books—Stockwell, Pomarede, Wimar, and Lewis—and led other Middle Westerners, not so adventurous, like David G. Blythe, John Insko Williams, and Godfrey Frankenstein to enlarge their canvases and seek fame through size. Banvard's panorama, according to Mary Burnet, "affected the early art of Indiana to a greater extent than anything else,"³⁶ and to a lesser degree the same might be said for Ohio and Missouri.

Blythe, born in the Ohio forests in 1815 and apprenticed as a youth to a Pittsburgh woodcarver, made his living as an itinerant portrait painter until confronted by the successful example of Banvard's landscape show. After 1847 it was his dream to make his fortune likewise. He painted an enormous panorama of western Pennsylvania landscapes and historical scenes and in its premiere at Uniontown, Pennsylvania, the realism of a thunderstorm in the last scene so scared the more naive spectators that they refused to leave the theater until assured that no thunder was crashing outside. But the tour failed and the panorama was cut up to make theatrical backdrops. Blythe subsequently became famous locally for his rough and tumble genre of taverns and streets and lusty satires of Pittsburgh life. The Carnegie Institute brought his work to public notice in 1932 and the Whitney Museum at New York showed it in April, 1936.³⁷

John Insko Williams, born at Dayton, Ohio, in 1813, pupil of George Winter, Indiana's Indian painter, friend of Thomas Sully, student in a Philadelphia art school for three years and at the McMicken School of Design in Cincinnati, saw Banvard's huge work and conceived the idea of a panorama of bible history, from creation to the fall of Babylon. Misfortune, however, was also his lot. After a preliminary exhibition in Ohio in 1849, he took it to Independence Hall where it was destroyed by fire in 1850. Undismayed, he painted it again, a total of four thousand square yards, and started on a tour of all parts of the United States. At Baltimore a flood washed off all the paint; he repainted it, only to have it destroyed again by fire.³⁸

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Godfrey Frankenstein, the Ohioan who painted Niagara Falls in 1844, thirteen years before Church's spectacular canvas,³⁹ continued painting the falls in all seasons and from all points of view until 1866. As early as 1853 he made a vast panorama of the falls for exhibition throughout the country.⁴⁰

The one man who has left us some evidence of the early panoramic style, who perhaps first conceived the idea of portraying a whole region on canvas, and who is closest to Wisconsin by reason of having painted there, is Henry Lewis.

Lewis was born in England in 1819 and emigrated to St. Louis in 1836, where by the early forties he was a stage carpenter at the opera house and undoubtedly assisted with the scene painting. Often it was the theater which gave the inspiration and method of scenery painting. Lewis, at least at the outset, was self-taught in the school of the opera house. Catlin's and Bodmer's pictures of the Mississippi River dating from the thirties and J. C. Wald's *The Valley of the Mississippi*, illustrated by lithographs of his paintings and published in 1841 at St. Louis, may have been suggestive to Lewis. But he was the first to conceive, according to his biographer, the plan of a continuous panorama of the entire river and it was he who communicated the idea to Banvard.⁴¹

Stockwell and Pomarede, following Banvard's example, but bent on out-doing him, started Mississippi panoramas six hundred and twenty-five yards long. Lewis began to work with each of them (Carl Wimar subsequently, in 1849, became Pomarede's assistant), but personal differences soon disrupted the alliance and Lewis, in 1846, started a panorama of his own. He travelled slowly by rowboat to Fort Snelling, back to New Orleans and thence up the river again to St. Louis, making detailed sketches. He repeated the trip a second time, this time spending forty-eight days on the river, to check his sketches. He started painting from his sketches in St. Louis in September, 1847, and two years later, in September, 1849, had completed a canvas twelve feet high and thirteen hundred and twenty-five yards long, twice the size of Banvard's or Stockwell's, showing the Mississippi River, its topography, its towns, and typical activity, from St. Anthony Falls at St. Paul to New Orleans. He promptly took it on tour to the larger cities of the East. It was, to the spectators, the same as experiencing a trip along the river itself.

Saluting Lewis' departure with his work, the editor of a contemporary St. Louis periodical in October, 1849, says:

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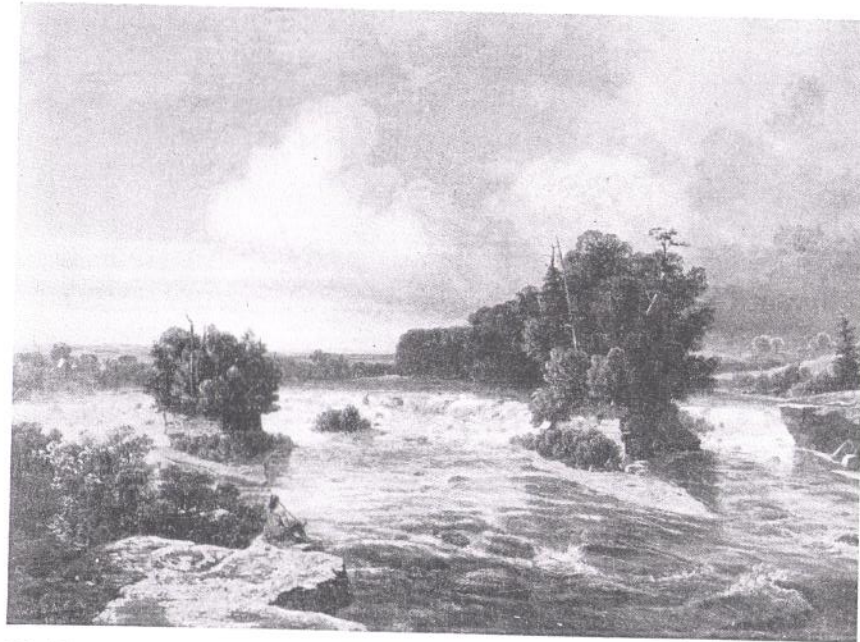
"We went to see it in the same spirit that we are wont to ramble through the living forest, and beside the flowing river . . . and we can say with truth, that we never enjoyed a higher degree of pleasure from the exhibition of any work of art that we have witnessed."⁴²

At Washington the show was met with similar astonishment and applause. President Zachary Taylor and Governor James Doty of Wisconsin, among others, went to see it. Following the successful financial trail discovered by Audubon, Catlin, and Banvard, Lewis took his panorama to England for exhibition. What eventually became of the gigantic canvas is not known, but Lewis himself settled at Düsseldorf in 1851, joining the American fraternity of artists gathering there for instruction and continuing his painting of both landscapes and portraits, now in the Düsseldorf manner. For a time he was American consul in Düsseldorf. He wrote the story of his Mississippi adventure in German, *Das Illustrirte Mississippithal*, reworked his sketches, secured a lithographer to make colored plates, and in 1857 the book was published. Unhappily this event coincided with the bankruptcy of his publisher and the book was sold for waste. Barely twenty copies still exist, and the work was hardly known until its discovery by bibliophiles after Lewis' death in 1904 and an eventual reprinting in 1923.

To judge the nature of Lewis' original landscape painting as represented by his panorama is a complex problem. The lithographs of his sketches were done by a German craftsman, and a comparison of one of the plates, of St. Anthony Falls, with the same subject by Lewis in oil, now in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, shows at once that while the lithograph retains the salient topographical features and disposition of forms, it has so smoothed the artist's painting into flat poster effects as to obliterate the sweep and rush of the water, the depth of the foliage, and the sensitive forming of huge white clouds that characterize the oil painting. The style of the painter's brush is lost. Color notes are reduced to a few standard pastel blue-greens and ochre-browns that run through the whole series of plates.

On the other hand the oil painting itself is not accurately indicative of the panorama technique, for it was done from sketches at Düsseldorf in 1855, after four years of Düsseldorf influence. About all that can be judged are elements of composition, and, as might be expected from a knowledge of either frontier or Düsseldorf emphasis on realism, there are none, that is, in the sense of the artist's constructive forming of the scene. The landscape itself composes the picture, and Lewis takes no liberties with nature; his service, as both the lithograph and the painting of St. Anthony Falls show, was to describe it. The lithograph follows the painting in all essential respects of the placement

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PL. 11

PHOTO, COURTESY OF MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS
ST. ANTHONY FALLS, BY HENRY LEWIS, 1855
Minneapolis Institute of Arts

of forms, which is as haphazard as the true scene, viewed casually, would be. The point of view is taken from a raised place above the river looking straight upstream. The white falls extend horizontally across the breadth of the picture, intersected by two jutting, tree-cropped rocks. The foreground is empty save for the swirling water and the tiny figure of an Indian sitting on a ledge—the one gratuitous addition by the artist. Beyond the falls, the panoramic sweep of the valley is given, the horizon line dividing the picture exactly in half. The eye focuses nowhere.

But Lewis, for his time, unquestionably had talent as a painter, and no better evidence could be adduced than a comparison with the landscapes of Cole and Durand, considered our foremost native landscapists before 1850, which hang in the same room at Minneapolis with his "St. Anthony Falls." Lewis has by far the most vigorous hand; his canvas is not so smooth and finished and academic; it has life and activity compared to Cole's and Durand's, which are peaceful idylls. The sky and water are actually more convincing than in Durand's "The Catskill Valley," painted in 1863 after his own Düssel-

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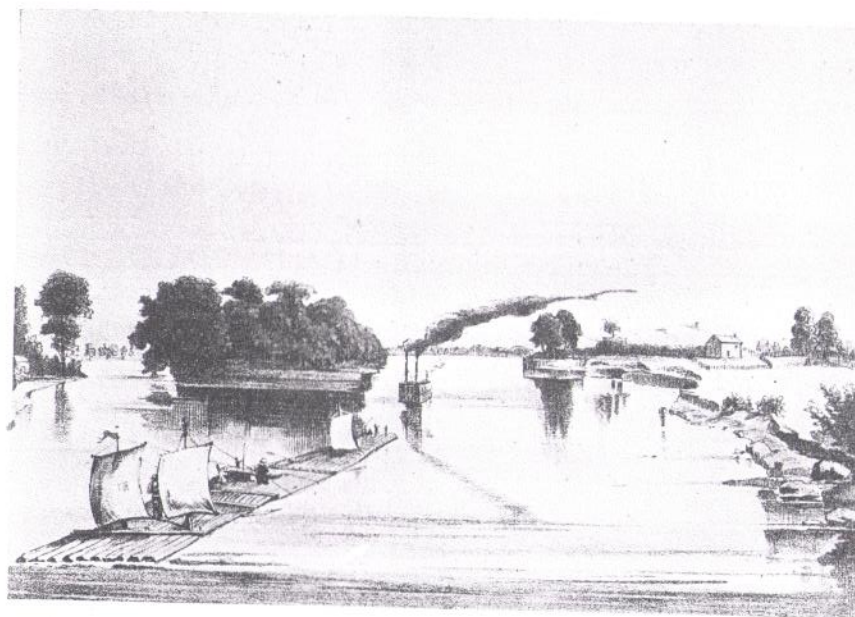
dorf training, or in Cole's "West Point" of 1829, done in his best period before he had visited Europe and become imbued with the grand style.⁴³ The creamy tinted clouds, well-formed, light and airy, altogether painterly, and set off against a delicate blue sky, are the best painted part of Lewis' picture. He is least sure of the technique of foliage; it is the Düsseldorf green, hard and dirty but massed in application rather than detailed in the fine Düsseldorf manner. Notwithstanding, his canvas is the brightest and gayest of the three. Cole's style, admittedly, is more finished and painterly; with a splotchy impasto he breaks up his surfaces with varying color notes of pale blue, lavender, and yellow, giving an illusion of sunlight. Durand is the most meticulous in describing every leaf and by reason of his unvarying dull brown-green, the most sombre. Compared to either, Lewis gives a breath of life.

A review of the other plates in Lewis' book strengthens the impression that his panorama was a form of nature representation unique to the Middle West. To consider only the examples of scenes in Wisconsin: "Lake Pepin" is a simple view of a broad body of water proceeding straight from the beholder into depth and framed by a flat band of river bank on either side. The top two-thirds of the plate is empty sky. The lake is seen as a passerby might view it from a boat in the center, indifferent to spectacular and artistic possibilities but interested in knowing where he was. There is no Düsseldorf crowding here and not the slightest straining for effect. The empty panorama concept is only American,—western American.

In the "Mouth of the River St. Croix," the "Mouth of the Chippeway," and the "Mouth of the Wisconsin," again the distinctive topography of the river bluffs and the geographical relations of the two rivers, and nothing else, speaks. There is no invention; the places shown are recognizable today, though the lithograph makes the treatment sometimes appear summary and a foreground tree is added on occasion, perhaps by the lithographer, for decorative effect. Landscape is primary with Lewis. Even to a subject like "Indians Spearing Fish," which Catlin treated as a figure painter would, Lewis reacts as a scenist, giving the overhanging cliffs and trees the same importance as the actors.

It is quite possible that in others of Lewis' Wisconsin scenes we have a further indication of Seth Eastman's landscape painting. To make his half mile of canvas (which otherwise might be monotonous as purely river scenery) alive with history and activity as it unrolled, Lewis added at the appropriate places incidents quite unrelated in time: Indian battles, the passage of steamboats, even the St. Louis fire. Included in these addenda was Cassville in 1829, the Battle of Bad Axe, 1832, and Prairie du Chien, showing old Fort Crawford

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PL. 12

FROM LITHOGRAPH, DAS ILLUSTRIRTE MISSISSIPPIHAL
MOUTH OF THE RIVER ST. CROIX, BY HENRY LEWIS

in 1830. Interested as ever in being correct, he based his work on sketches generously offered him by Eastman, whom he met at Fort Snelling when he arrived there in 1848. The large oil painting which he subsequently made of Fort Crawford, acquired in 1934 by the Minnesota Historical Society, was also based on Eastman's sketch, but with many embellishments and changes, the result of Düsseldorf elaborations.⁴⁴

How far apart regional scenists of the Middle West like Lewis were from the approach and style of a contemporary European, but not Düsseldorfian, artist may be instructively seen in a comparison with the sketches by John B. Wengler made in Wisconsin, at the same time and in the same places. Wengler was an Austrian artist who travelled in Wisconsin in 1850-51 and whose forty-one sketches, signed, dated, and placed, were acquired in photograph form by the Wisconsin Historical Society from the museum of Linz, Austria, in 1928. Watercolors of Prairie du Chien, Madison, Milwaukee, Sauk Prairie, St. Paul, and several Indian portraits are included.

The prairie scenes are undulating, wispy areas, alternately sunstruck and deeply shadowed. The similarity to the open-country landscapes of several Wisconsin artists of contemporary times is striking. The Indians are described

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in color spots; nothing is hard or crisp. The Indians become generalized types rather than specific individuals; their heads receive emphasis but the costumes are given in a line or two—something Catlin would never do. Milwaukee is seen from an accidental point of view, in which a foreground farmyard and hummock are the most important parts of the picture, dominating the panorama of the whole city. In his "St. Anthony Falls" and in contrast to Lewis, Wengler takes a point of view close in under the falls. The foreground water and the sky are only sketchily roughed in. There is no panorama, the falling water is the single subject. Along the rivers and in the towns this picturesque point of view is always sought, forecasting what American art was in time to become under European influence.

All Wengler's sketches are amazingly summary and suggestive; the strokes are broad, almost impressionistic, and composed into a singleness of effect. There are definitely contrasting masses of dark and light, vivid sunlight effects, and usually a focal point of view. The artist's hand, and not the scene, constructs the form of the picture. One cannot tell where, geographically, the places are or precisely what the things represented are. The views might serve equally well for any region. Nothing could be more antithetical to the method and intention of the Mississippi panorama painters.

Wengler hurried home with his sketches, and it is doubtful that any Wisconsin natives even saw them. And if they had, they probably would not have understood them, accustomed as they were to look for facts in painting, tangible to the last detail and unchanged by an artist's caprice.

With Lewis in 1849 and the panoramas which followed, this first experience of Wisconsin in picture making, an era almost solely of painting as fact reporting, came to an end. The incursions of the early Indian and panorama painters left no permanent cultural results, no immediately formative influence on art development, and no inspiration to a younger generation of native Western painters other than an anthropological- and geographical-mindedness—the urge to preserve for posterity the lineaments and the customs of a vanishing people or to report the curiosities of a new country. This is because, with rare exceptions, the painters of the Indians and the panoramists did not leave their art in the Middle West. Their art, essentially, was of the West but for the East. In this sense they served a highly useful, if not always artistic, function. Literally, though they brought no art to the West, they helped bring people there, which is an obvious prerequisite for sustaining any art. And many came ready to see the West as they had seen it in J. O. Lewis', Eastman's, and Catlin's portfolios and Henry Lewis' panorama, as the traveller is predisposed to see Italy and France in the terms of the posters and illustrated

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brochures that have attracted him there. The painter's vision lingers, and since that of the frontier reporters was one of strict factualism it is not incomprehensible that they helped fix the course that painting was expected by the frontier inhabitants to take.

In any case, the correct topography and naturalistic genre which they employed as the essence of their work had not been the material of artistic enterprise. When Asher B. Durand, a contemporary, said, "Go to nature to learn to paint landscape," he was saying something new. When Audubon decided to paint birds and Catlin Indians "as they are" in their native haunts, this too was new. Consciously or not, with Durand and Cole, the painter reporters were starting an American tradition in art. They gave the physiognomy of a particular region and its particular inhabitants, and in a primitive way initiated "regionalism" and photographic naturalism. Constructive, creative use of this motif had to wait on a few rare spirits like Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. Unhappily, the motif was dropped by the vast majority of artists, facing international competition and the advance of photography, before it ever had the chance to develop.

ART AS THE HALLMARK OF CULTURE

Although she came from and returned to the Middle West, Mrs. Hoxie as an artist was not a product of the Middle West but of classical Europe. She was a child prodigy at first but her work shows principally the influence of her professional European instructors, Bonnat in Paris and Majoli in Rome, and the finish of the Italian marble cutters. She readily adopted the classic Italian Psyches for subjects; her Lincoln has a sweet, smooth face and is cloaked in a Roman toga; her Farragut, much stronger, nevertheless is posed with affected heroism. The frontier contributed nothing of its usual insistence on naturalism to her training and nothing to her outlook, except the will to keep working in the face of adversity and the assurance that the practice of art was a province for women as well as men. Neither did the Middle West ask for her work until she was famous (she finally did a bust of Governor Kirkwood of Iowa for statuary hall); even the East was skeptical at first. She was raised to eminence not so much because of her art as because two democratic Middle West sponsors, Major Rollins and Lincoln, lent sympathy and encouragement—she was poor and without influence—and later because she was a woman and the toast of Washington, and had adopted the currently popular Italian style.

The experience of Vinnie Ream is typical of the desire of the "uncouth" pioneers to cultivate the talent of a promising daughter, rarely matched by a similar patronage for a son, whose chances for self-improvement were thought to be better taken in business and the more manly professions. Paralleling closely Vinnie Ream's story is that of Ohio's child prodigy, Lily Martin. Lily, born in 1826 of French farmer parents who settled at Marietta, experimented with charcoal on the walls of her house and when only fifteen held an exhibition of her works. In three years she did fifty paintings without benefit of instruction. Then Nicholas Longworth of Cincinnati—again note the indispensability of the sympathetic, wealthy patron—heard of her and offered her an art education at Cincinnati. At the height of her career she was called to do portraits for Mrs. Benjamin Harrison, Robert Ingersoll, and many other public figures, and Senator Sprague of New Jersey paid twenty thousand dollars for her allegory in the approved French academy mode, "Truth Unveiling Falsehood."³⁵

Women were as often benefactors as beneficiaries in the sponsorship of art as culture. The services of women in forming the first art schools and societies has already been noted; in addition, in Wisconsin, of the public or semi-public gifts of monuments and single works of art, apart from those donated to the Layton Art Gallery, all but one, up until 1898, were the gifts of women.³⁶

ART AS THE HALLMARK OF CULTURE

Aside from the continuing painting of portraits, the first three decades after 1850 were clearly and principally an era of art for and by ladies. The urge to educate women in the arts of gentility had the effect of fixing in the public mind the notion that the practise of painting was feminine. Durward, when he gave instruction, taught young women; Robertson gave up portrait painting to teach in a girls' seminary; the itinerant teachers catered to "young Ladies," and even Vianden, though he painted for the sake of trees, found most of his pupils among the women of Milwaukee. So long as art was confined so exclusively to the aesthetic development of young ladies, the practical minded, masculine bourgeoisie pioneers were not going to get very excited about it. A number of more advanced business and professional men, to be sure, attempted in 1872, as Durward and Robertson had in the late 1840's, to form a "Milwaukee Art Association" for the support of an art school and permanent exhibitions, but the venture lived for only a few weeks, proving "unsuccessful in all its objects."³⁷ Only when men, other than the few enthusiasts, saw the practical, money-earning applications of art was their interest stirred. The lithographer's and engraver's art was now in great demand and to a commercial school, founded by Julius Gugler, head of Milwaukee's leading lithography house, and employing a professional, Louis Kurtz of Chicago, young men began to flock for training in the early seventies. The engraving studios, notwithstanding their practical aims, performed on occasion a salutary service to art; in the Gugler-Kurtz school, Robert Schade was prompted to take further instruction from Vianden; likewise Carl Marr, who first studied engraving in his father's shop at fifteen. Vianden sent both young men to Munich.

The cause of art culture so strenuously pursued by the women was not to be laid aside permanently by the men, however. It was simply delayed, and for the very good reasons that most of them had neither the time nor the money to advance latent expectations of eventual gentility for themselves, or more precisely, prestige. The women had held full sway, in part, because they had little competition from busy men.

It was not until 1879 that the country really recovered from the depression following the 1873 crisis,³⁸ and it was five years later, or 1884, before the five transcontinental railroads had pierced the frontier to its limit and reached the Pacific.³⁹ Eyes were on the West, war reconstruction, and economic salvation; art could be let go for the time. Just as soon as the financial depression ended, however, things began to happen. The great Industrial Exposition art exhibition was achieved in 1881, training attention on art matters on a large scale,

canvas is lighter. Hands are better modelled, though still lifeless. Most marked is his skill in catching the semblance of pink satin sleeves seen through lace, alongside which Harding's lace collar and cuffs for "Mrs. Kinsley" are inept, hasty, and slap-dash. No extraneous paraphernalia is added. The canvas has a unity and the subject a dignity compared to which Brookes' work is still the folk art of the limners.

"Joshua Hathaway," pioneer surveyor, painted in 1860, gives even a stronger effect. The head answers to the artist's designing, rather than simply peering stolidly from an accidental placement in the frame. Hands and chair are subordinated and all forms are organized coherently in support of the bold construction of the head, a construction based on factualism but not literally factual itself. Even the background, a rich saffron-brown, shading into deep chocolate, is an unusual color note among its thin green, mustard, and gray contemporaries and it harmonizes with the coloring of the face. This feeling for unity was not accidental with Durward; it was one of his controlling attitudes of mind that form and a headship or direction, in poetry or art, was necessary to every organism, an idea which led him to agree readily also to the concept of papal supremacy as essential to the existence of the Church. "You have no Pope in your picture," he told an artist whose composition lacked a focus and supreme unifying element.³⁸ Such construction and such coloring as Durward's was not soon to be seen again in Wisconsin. He was a figure slightly apart from the mainstream of the state's art.

George J. Robertson, another Scotchman, came to Milwaukee in 1846 from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in London,³⁹ where he had studied for ten years, to share a studio with Durward for a time. Together, with one or two other artists, they attempted to form, about 1848, a "Wisconsin Academy of Fine Arts," as Eckstein had in Ohio twenty years earlier. But like Eckstein they only reached the stage of drawing incorporation papers and nothing further came of it.⁴⁰ Robertson remained in Milwaukee several years, painting many portraits and a few landscapes, but little is known of him other than that he later moved to Rockford, Illinois, to become a teacher of drawing and painting at the Rockford Young Ladies Seminary, like so many other artists after the fifties, finding a livelihood in the teaching of his art rather than in the practice of it.

Durward, besides his attempts with Robertson and through writing to further art in the young city, interested himself in the work of other artists, demonstrating that the lone wolf days of the itinerants were ending and a community of art interest forming. The old guest book at the glen gallery is dotted with the names of early artists, among them Lydia Ely and John Conway.

He was well acquainted with and admired Henry Vianden, arriving in 1849 from Germany, and somewhere acquired a small figure of an Indian dancing, probably by George Catlin; a seascape by Vianden with imposing cliffs still hangs in Durward's house and the oval framed Indian in the gallery at the glen.

He undoubtedly knew, also, his countryman, Henry Vane Thorne, a young English gentleman, son of Lady Vane, who arrived in Milwaukee in 1847 with a portfolio of "attractive sketches" from England and proceeded to do landscapes of Milwaukee scenery. Vane opened a drawing class—the first private studio of instruction in the state—and his youth (he was not yet 21) and his "entertaining and genial qualities" won him many pupils.⁴¹ He had money to ward off the usual shocks the frontier dealt the artist; he was popular and on his way to developing the first colony of student artists (among them Lydia Ely); but it was all cut short by his accidental death, and Milwaukee art students were deprived of a possible English landscape inheritance and the artistic ideals of a young artist of the generation of the 1820's. Instead they were to have only the older Vianden and the German tradition to rely upon.

Thorne had a genial competitor in the person of Alexander Marquis, who was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and came to Milwaukee in 1850, announcing himself as both a portrait painter and teacher of drawing.⁴² Little is recorded of his early life other than that he was a gentleman's son, made his first studies in Glasgow and possibly at the Scotch Academy in Edinburgh later, and that he admired the paintings of Raeburn;⁴³ in Milwaukee he marvelled to his friends that Raeburn's great merit had not received wider fame. Marquis' life in Milwaukee was an industrious one—he painted more than three hundred portraits in thirty years for Milwaukeeans and out-of-town patrons—but it was never separated from the companionship of poverty, the prices received from his work being pitifully meager. The style of his earlier work showed the refinement of his cultivated training until "photography had shed its baneful influence."⁴⁴

Marquis was not especially gifted. Even in his "photographic period," while the face of "Col. John W. Jefferson," a Wisconsin Historical Museum portrait painted about 1876, is faithfully reproduced, the beard is a puzzle to him, bending stiffly in under the chin and out again rather than hanging straight. And he neglects to paint sufficiently over the brown background to make the right sleeve the same blue as the rest of the military uniform. It is worthy of note that while he succumbed, somewhat falteringly, to the current demand for photographic exactitude, it was his earlier refinement and grace of style that was "highly prized" by Milwaukee families at a later date when painted photography had outlived its usefulness.⁴⁵ Marquis eventually fol-