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A CATALOGUE OF THE EARLY LANDSCAPES OF FREDERIC CHURCH, 1844-1853

Rice University M.A. 1986

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A CATALOGUE OF THE EARLY LANDSCAPES
OF FREDERIC CHURCH, 1844-1853

by

JENNY CAROLINE BAIRD

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

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Houston, Texas
May, 1986
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Abstract

A CATALOGUE OF THE EARLY LANDSCAPES
OF FREDERIC CHURCH, 1844-1853

Jenny Caroline Baird

American landscape artist Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) painted about one half of his life's work between 1844 and 1853. This catalogue is the first formal analysis of the early works. It begins with paintings which reflect the style of Church's teacher Thomas Cole to a remarkable degree. In his earliest works, Church understands landscape to be a series of curvilinear forms which guide the viewer's path on a winding trip through vegetation. By the time he paints View near Stockbridge (1847), he also defines landscape movement as progression through space toward a light-filled focus. His most "realistic" works are ideal compositions which give the appearance of real scenery under special conditions of light. The consummate painting of Church's youth, Home by the Lake (1852), is a logical development from the earlier works.
I should like to thank John Hallam, my thesis director, for his suggestion that formal analysis of an artist's works is a timely -- possibly pioneering -- approach to American art. John Hallam, Katherine Brown, and Bill Camfield have taught me to understand that the history of art is the history of splendid intellects, the most splendid, possibly, who have ever lived. The critic cannot afford to underestimate the thought process of any artist. It has been a pleasure to approach the thought process of the great Frederic Church.

I should also like to thank several scholars and curators who have shared information and reproductions of paintings without charge. I deeply thank James Ryan, Manager, and Jane Churchill, Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York. I also thank Milan Hughston, Librarian, and Linda Ayres, Curator of Paintings, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth; J. Gray Sweeney, Senior Research Fellow, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Anne Dettre, Office of the Curator, The White House, Washington, D.C.; Nancy Condon, Director, Alexander Gallery, New York; Kenneth Quail, Registrar, Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York; and Phyllis Henderson, Des Moines Women's Club, Des Moines, Iowa.

Signed
To Katherine Brown and the Department of Art and Art History
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INTRODUCTION

Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) was born in Hartford, Connecticut — the only son of Eliza Janes Church, descendant of the Mayflower Bradfords, and Joseph Church, prominent Hartford businessman and friend of Daniel Wadsworth. Wadsworth, another Mayflower descendant and Hartford's leading patron of the arts, early recognized the natural talent of the young Frederic, who spent much of his time outdoors sketching clouds and unusual atmospheric effects in the sky.\(^1\) Although his family felt that art would not be a respectable profession for him to pursue, Church's father allowed Wadsworth to arrange for the youth to spend two years (1844-1846) in Catskill, New York, studying with America's finest landscape painter, Thomas Cole, who was twenty-five years Church's senior.\(^2\)

The accompanying catalogue of works begins with the paintings which Church produced under Cole, his earliest extant landscapes. Cole encouraged Church to find his own style through trial and error, and to sketch from nature; Church's early works were nonetheless strongly indebted to his teacher's style. He absorbed the palpable, thick-edged treatment of forms which Cole used in all periods of his career, and adapted the atmospheric depth and sense of space and monumentality of Cole's later works — works which were in the Catskill studio.

In 1846 Church moved to New York City, acquired a studio in the Art-Union Building, and continued to paint landscapes in the style of his teacher. His first decade in New York was the most intense period of production in his career. His father was reconciled to Frederic's
choice of profession in these years, because the artist
was soon financially independent.

During the next decade (1856-1865), Church became
America's most famous landscape artist. His best-known
landscapes come from this period: Heart of the Andes,
1857; Niagara, 1857 (Figure 14); and Cotopaxi, 1862 (Fig-
ure 55). These paintings were direct developments from
the composition and surface treatment of forms which
evolved in his early period (1844-1853).

After the mid-1860's, deaths in Church's family, a
battle with crippling rheumatism, preoccupation with mar-
riage and family, and the building of his great estate
Olana occupied much of his time. Some of these activities
may have been a retreat from painting. In the late 1860's,
his large works for the first time seemed to trouble him,
to show signs of feebleness; and he was criticized for
treating the surface of these works with virtuoso light
effects without understanding their structure. By the
time he died, Church was a forgotten painter. He had con-
tributed to the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art;
in May 1900 (the month after he died) a rather half-hearted
memorial exhibition was staged there. Charles Warner and
others wrote tributes, but the selection of paintings was
sparse and attendance poor.

David Huntington revived interest in Church with his
1960 dissertation and his 1966 monograph. He also arranged
the first major retrospective exhibition of Church's works
(under the auspices of the Smithsonian) in 1966. A full
biography and catalogue raisonné have yet to be written.
In 1984, the first exhibition of the early works was staged
at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth. A catalogue of
this exhibition, written by Gerald Carr and Franklin Kelly,
is soon to be published. A dissertation by Franklin Kelly
which treats Church's North American landscapes, 1845-1860,
should be available within a year.
To the author's knowledge, this thesis is the first catalogue of Church's early works. The thirty-six paintings which are described, plus the several extant works for which illustrations are unavailable and the two dozen works known to be lost, comprise roughly half of Church's œuvre. These works were painted between 1844 and the spring of 1853: from Church's first months with Cole to the disbandment of the Art-Union and his trip to South America with Cyrus Field.

Church had already begun to sample an exotic locale in his annual trips to Mount Desert Island off the coast of Maine (from 1850). Here he developed the sense of unlimited space and low horizon which would be characteristic of his later paintings. The Mount Desert experience also gave him the desire to find other expansive views to paint. It may have been the second most important stimulus of his career, the first being undoubtedly Cole's overwhelming influence, in combination with that of the Art-Union. At the Art-Union, Church would learn from painters like Durand and Cropsey, who were also influenced by Cole.

The close of his early period coincides with the disbandment of the Art-Union in early 1853. It had begun as a commercial venture (called the Apollo Association in 1838 and the Art-Union from 1842), and was essentially a lottery, open to all who paid an annual membership fee (five dollars in 1848). Over the period of a year, it would purchase paintings and sculpture from promising as well as established artists, and would offer the works as prizes in a drawing held each December. Church and many other American artists were extremely fortunate to be able to sell paintings to the Art-Union before they gained individual patrons. During its final years of existence, the Art-Union had as many as 16,000 subscribers a year. It distributed some 2,400 paintings by over 250 artists, and created for the first time a national audience for American art. Its
Bulletin was the first art journal in America.

A long chapter in the Warner manuscript, based on Church's memoirs (see Note 1), praises the Art-Union and mourns its untimely end. Warner does not, however, explain why a lawsuit was undertaken against the Art-Union. Church may not have known who the instigators of the lawsuit were. According to Edgar Richardson,

... certain artists, who felt that they were not so much favored as others, helped to initiate a legal suit which led to a court decision outlawing the Art Union as a lottery. All the Art Unions [there were others in Philadelphia, Boston, and Cincinnati] thus came to an end in 1852 [or early 1853]; and once again artists were dependent on sales from their studios, or from the three annual exhibits in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, until the rise of the art dealer's gallery in the second half of the century.9

Church did not depend on the patronage of the Art-Union after 1848. His works of 1847-1849 received critical attention and attracted patrons like Cyrus Field, Marshall Owen Roberts, and William Osborn -- American financiers who preferred large highly detailed landscapes.

Today these landscapes are to be found principally in America. The National Gallery of Scotland owns one painting (a view of Niagara Falls), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano has three; but most of his paintings are scattered throughout the United States. Few museums or private collectors own more than one major painting apiece -- except for the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford (eleven), the collection at Olana (at least a dozen), and the combined holdings of several museums in New York and Washington, D.C. (another fifteen). Twenty-four paintings by Church are available to the public in twenty more cities, from Seattle to Albany.
His drawings and oil sketches are divided between Olana (about 800) and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York (about 2000), although a few of Church's oil sketches have appeared in the art market during the past ten years. Olana has nearly all of the drawings dated 1852 and earlier; Cooper-Hewitt has the later drawings and most of the oil sketches.  

Church began his painting career by making copies of Cole's works and sketching natural forms such as cows and trees. These simple studies gave him an understanding of tactile structure very similar to his teacher's. As he matured, Church added his own method of highlighting forms to this sense of structure, and he took special pleasure in using contrasting textures to enliven the surface of the landscape. He understood landscape even in his earliest years as a series of curvilinear forms which would guide the viewer's path on a winding trip through vegetation. In View near Stockbridge, 1847 (Plate 18), he demonstrated that landscape movement could imply progression through time as well as space, ideally toward a light-filled focus. His most "realistic" landscapes were often composites of various sketches he had made from nature, carefully constructed to engross the viewer in patterns of light and dark, curves and textures -- compositions which would provide ideal settings for well-known stories. By the time Church painted *An Old Boat* (Plate 30) and *Home by the Lake* (Plate 33), he had produced some of the finest works of his career. Indeed, after 1853 he would not again paint works at once so well composed and finely detailed as the best works of his early period.  

*Mount Ktaaidn*, 1853 (Plate 36), and the South American paintings of 1854-1855 introduced a new element (tentative in these years) which would indirectly lead to the destruction of form in hazy bright light. The last work which
contained both virtuoso light treatment and clear understanding of structure may have been his Cotopaxi, 1862 (Figure 55). Even the highly detailed works of his later period tended to emphasize a virtuoso surface treatment at the expense of structure. The painting which made Church world famous, Niagara, 1857 (Figure 14), is subject to this criticism. It uses the basic undulating design which Church perfected in View near Stockbridge (Plate 18), and adds to this the incomparable surface treatment and wide horizon of his Mount Desert pictures. However, the extreme width of Niagara tends to split the work in half for the viewer; the eye follows the S-curve to the upper right edge and off the canvas, and then comes back through the left side of the work, as though Niagara were two separate paintings hanging as pendants. This may have been the artist's intended effect, but he never again painted a work so disproportionately wide.

The early works of Church are overdue for careful analysis. Entire books have been written on Niagara, but not one thoughtful essay has treated *Home by the Lake, 1852 (Plate 33). This consummate painting is a logical development from the other works of Church's youth. His early period closes with works of mature power -- explicit in both structure and surface detail.

In 1853 Church was highly respected by other landscape painters who were acquiring national reputations (Cropsey, Gignoux, and Huntington, for example), and who recognized Cole and Durand as masters. Neither Cole nor Durand nor any of Church's generation, however, developed special light effects within a semblance of naturalism to the level which Church did between 1847 and 1853. His youthful paintings were pioneering works whose atmospheric effects were not fully understood by contemporaries, although they were acknowledged to be singular as early as 1850 (see the commentary for Plate 24, *Twilight, "Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and
Night'). These paintings provided the technical foundation for his later panoramic showpieces, and exerted a powerful influence on American landscape artists of the 1860's and 1870's (such as Kensett and Heade) who produced glowing, quiet, "luminist" works.

Notes

1 According to Charles Dudley Warner, editor of the Hartford Courant and friend of the artist in his mature years, in his unpublished biography, "Frederic Edwin Church" (1900). Late in life, Church gave Warner access to his memoirs (now lost); unfortunately, Warner died in 1900, having written only five chapters. This work is now part of the collection of papers at Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York — the estate overlooking the Hudson River which Church built in the 1870's, and which the State of New York acquired in 1964.

2 In a letter to Cole dated May 8, 1844, Wadsworth described Church as a young man "between seventeen and eighteen years of age, who has evinced considerable talent for landscape" (Cole letters, New York State Library, Albany, New York; reproduced in Archives of American Art Microfilm Roll ALC2). Wadsworth added a postscript to this letter, reminding Cole of Wadsworth's longstanding patronage: "Your Mount Etna is in a safe place & in perfect preservation and much admired by the very few [who] have been permitted to see it . . . ."

3 The figures are additional illustrations to be found in Appendix A of this catalogue.

4 See the discussion attached to Plate 2 (Catskill Creek, c.1844/1846).

5 Refer to the first two pages of this catalogue for more information on Huntington's contributions, abbreviated
as Huntington, 1960; Huntington, 1966; and F.E. Church, 1966.

6 Gerald L. Carr and Franklin W. Kelly, Early Landscapes of Frederick Edwin Church [1845-1854] (Austin: University of Texas Press for the Amon Carter Museum, 1986). The author does not know how many works are to be included in this catalogue; if it follows the format of the 1984 exhibition, it will include seventeen paintings and fifteen pencil drawings and oil sketches.

7 Franklin Wood Kelly, "Frederick Edwin Church and the North American Landscape, 1845-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1985; to be published by University Microfilms International).

8 The best source of information about the Art-Union is the Bulletin, published irregularly from 1842 and regularly from 1848. See also Mary Bartlett Cowdrey's two-volume history of the Art-Union, which records transactions as well as individual artists' exhibition records: American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union, 1816-1852 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953).


10 In 1917 Louis Church, the artist's son and heir, heard of the Hewitt sisters and their attempts to save working drawings of Winslow Homer and other artists, works which had little appeal for collectors at the time. He offered the Hewitts a generous part of his father's collection, which they eagerly accepted.

11 An asterisk before a title indicates that it is Church's title, provided for the first public exhibition of the work.

12 Commissioned by James Lenox, who owned the first work by J.M.W. Turner to be displayed in America (Staffa, Fingal's Cave, c.1835). By the time he painted this Cotopaxi, Church was familiar with Turner's work.
CATALOGUE OF WORKS, 1844-1853

This is a descriptive catalogue of the early paintings by Church which are known to the author and for which illustrations are available. In the appendix are lists of extant early works for which illustrations are not available (Appendix B), and early works which are lost (Appendix C).

Each plate precedes the catalogue entry. Figures (additional illustrations) are to be found in Appendix A.

Titles which Church himself provided for the first public exhibition of the works in question, if known, are indicated with asterisks.

Height precedes width in the measurements.

Dates connected with provenance, and such bibliographic details as catalogue numbers and pagination, are included where possible.

Abbreviations

American Light, 1980

Cowdrey, 1943

Daniel Wadsworth, 1981
Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984


F.E. Church, 1966


Hudson River School, 1976


Huntington, 1960


Huntington, 1966


Warner, 1900

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These consist of pages:

All Illustrations
Plate 1

*View of Hartford, c.1844/1845.*

Oil on canvas, 11 x 15 1/2 inches.

Signed lower right: "F.B. Church."

Owner: Private Collection.


Illustrations: *Burlington Magazine* 115 (December 1973), page liii (Knoedler advertisement); *Antiques* 108 (October 1975), page 693 (Coe-Kerr advertisement); *American View: Art from 1770 to 1978* (exhibition catalogue, New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1978), no pagination (color plate 11); *Antiques* 113 (February 1978), page 278 (Kennedy color advertisement); *Connoisseur* 197 (February 1978), page 20 (Kennedy advertisement); *Connoisseur* 197 (March 1978), page 4 (Kennedy color advertisement).

*View of Hartford* is a view of both banks of the Connecticut River from the manufacturing district on the east side. It is possibly the only extant (signed) painting by Church which shows little influence of his teacher Thomas Cole.

Church took drawing lessons in 1842 from Benjamin Hutchins Coe, the Connecticut landscapist. Coe's work, however, was principally the drawing of picturesque vignettes (trees and statuary) to be engraved for book illustrations. There is no sense of Coe's influence on the subject or composition of this early work.

In June 1844, Church began his two years of study in Catskill with Thomas Cole, who told him to draw from nature. Some of Church's youthful drawings of cows are from this early date (Figure 1). On July 31st of that summer, Daniel Wadsworth's museum in Hartford opened to
the public, and two weeks later Church returned to Hartford for almost a month. He may have painted View of Hartford in August 1844, and certainly no later than 1845. It is even possible or likely that his mentor Wadsworth commissioned it and suggested the subject.

Among Wadsworth's favorite painters were the English, Irish, and American artists who pioneered landscape painting in America in the early nineteenth century: the history painter John Trumbull (who was also Wadsworth's wife's uncle), Thomas Birch, Robert Havell, Jr., Guy Wall, and Alvan Fisher, all of whom painted river landscapes, and whose works Church could have seen in the newly opened Wadsworth Atheneum (Figures 2 and 3). Even Wadsworth painted river landscapes (Figures 4 and 5).

View of Hartford undoubtedly comes from this pre-Hudson River School tradition. However, the scene is not thinly painted, as are the early nineteenth century American landscapes. Church emphasizes the foreground details and paints the sky in a thick impasto. He may already be thinking of landscape as an assortment of curvilinear, directional forms which lead the viewer's eye in an oval path on the ground plane, and landscape as a sky of commanding presence which contains both sunlight and storm.

Contemporary with View of Hartford is Durand's Big Bend, Passaic, 1845 (Figure 6), in which cows (and sheep) are used as pointers in space; they add mass, direction, and curved volume to a thin landscape. Church probably did not know Durand's work when he painted View of Hartford, but his perception of the cow in landscape is comparable. In the next ten years, Church will use the cow as a directional, volume-creating device in half a dozen paintings, influenced by or in sympathy with Durand's style. Durand will include cows, over the next ten years, in almost forty paintings.
Church does not have Durand's knowledge of atmospheric perspective in 1844. However, he has already learned how to juxtapose the near and far in the sky. In *View of Hartford*, he contrasts grainy, thin smoke which comes from a foreground chimney, with rounded, opaque, bulky clouds. These he treats in receding, ever paler layers within the sky opening.
Plate 2

Catskill Creek, c.1844/1846.
Oil on panel, 11 3/4 x 16 inches.
Unsigned.

Provenance: The artist (until 1900); Louis Palmer Church (his son); Sally Good (Mrs. Louis Palmer) Church (until 1964).


Church considered this painting, which is approximately the same size as View of Hartford (Plate 1), to be an oil sketch, and never offered it for sale. However, it is a highly finished oil sketch, perhaps the first work to show strong influence from Cole, and makes interesting contrast to Plate 1. The trees are painted in the same style, although those on the left in Catskill Creek are lightened on selective leaf edges, and a few trees to the right are backlit.

The strength of Catskill Creek is its convincing light-filled naturalism. Nonetheless, the work is contrived to give the appearance of open water; the subject is actually a very narrow creek. By portraying a small section of the creek and cutting off the edges of the bank on three sides of the picture, Church has created an expansive painting, two-thirds of which are sky and water. The addition of a foreground patch of land elevates the viewer over the water.

A model work by Cole, which Church must have seen in 1845, is River in the Catskills, 1843 (Figure 7). Cole, like Church, expands the sense of the actual site. The viewpoint is elevated, as in Plate 2, but there is little sense of distance between foreground and creek. Cole creates apparent depth by drawing the man in the foreground much larger than the figure in the boat, and by
encrusting the edges of foreground forms with yellow and pink "light." These Vermeer-like jewels of light create a sense of spotlit clarity in foreground forms. Church will subsequently adopt this treatment in such works as Christian on the Borders of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" (Plate 11) and *To the Memory of Cole (Plate 19).

Cole's River in the Catskills may derive ultimately from Durand's engraving, Catskill Mountains, 1830 (Figure 8), which Durand seems to have made after one of his own drawings. Cole had introduced Durand to the New York highland regions (Adirondacks and Catskills), and to landscape painting, in the late 1820's. From that time on, they surely influenced each other; Cole began to use the engraver's treatment of crisp detail in foreground and middle distance forms, and Durand adopted Cole's application of light to the edges of forms. Cole painted an earlier work (View on the Catskill, Early Autumn, 1837, Metropolitan Museum of Art) which has the same setting as Durand's engraving (Figure 8) and as his own later painting (Figure 7); but it is the later painting, barren of foreground framing devices and filled with bright detail, which seems to have inspired Church's Catskill Creek.

It is interesting to look at a contemporary oil sketch by Cole, Study for "The Hunter's Return", 1845 (Figure 9). This was as finished an oil sketch as Cole ever did. He used sketches simply to work out the structure and movement in the composition, and must have been amazed that his student would develop the surface of the forms in such a study. Church's brilliant eye for drawing may have inspired his teacher to look more closely at the surface of his own work, 1845-1848.

Church would be criticized in his later years, 1869 and after, for losing this freshness and for treating the surface of his large works with virtuoso light effects without understanding their structure. However, even in
these later years, his oil sketches would remain as crisp and coherent as Catskill Creek, a work unsurpassed in Church's youth for its pleasing juxtaposition of glassy water surface and palpable vegetation. The successor to Catskill Creek will be Church's renowned *West Rock, New Haven, 1849 (Plate 23).

Notes

1 This illustration does not reproduce the pale chain of hills on the horizon, which are similar to those in Plate 2.


3 According to Richard Wunder, Preface to F.E. Church, 1966, page 10:

... for the first time [c.1869] a certain feebleness seems to penetrate his art, particularly the larger, more ambitious works ... The details of form are subordinated to the effects of light, and ... the attention to detail, which had been an obviously joyful concern of the artist previously, was now all but suppressed ... Yet in his smaller works executed during those later years, Church remained appealingly fresh.
Plate 3

Ox-Bow (after Thomas Cole), c.1844/1846.
Oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 30 1/4 inches.
Signed lower left: "FEC."

Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Andrew S. Peters, New Jersey.


Plates 3 and 4, like Plates 1 and 2, are works most probably painted during Church's student days with Thomas Cole. The Ox-Bow (Plate 3) and Niagara Falls (Plate 4) are the only known copies of finished works by Cole. In his dissertation, Jeremy Adamson says that each picture "is not so much a copy as a selectively-edited version of the original." An examination of Cole's works to which Church referred will help to clarify his artistic relationship to Cole and reveal his own approach to form and space.

Church was Cole's student during the last several years of his teacher's life, after Cole's mature approach to form had been modified by his Italian experience of 1841-1842. Two paintings by Cole of the same subject: Aqueduct near Rome, 1832 (Figure 10), and Roman Campagna, 1843 (Figure 11), may be compared. The later work seems far more expansive and monumental, although it is less than half the size of the earlier. The later work is also a close-up view of the architecture in the right half of the earlier work, to the same scale. It is as though Cole physically cuts up his 1832 work in 1843, and, most important, changes the lighting. He increases atmospheric
perspective by making the distant mountains more pale; he increases the apparent mass of foreground and middleground forms by darkening them and using dramatic backlighting (the resultant pattern of long shadows also increases the viewer's sense of recession into infinite distance). He adds highlights to the edges of foreground forms, and mutes the overall range of colors, providing crisp touches of red and gold in the foreground.

Cole's later approach to structure -- increasing the monumentality, spaciousness, and atmospheric perspective -- is not lost on the student. Cole painted The Ox-Bow in 1836 (Figure 12) on a large canvas that he had prepared for his Course of Empire series. Church may have seen this work in 1844/1846, but more likely he referred to engravings of Cole's The Ox-Bow and to oil sketches (such as Figure 13) which were in the studio. His copy is smaller than Cole's original work, but more monumental. Church has increased the proportionate size of the dark foreground and increased the atmospheric perspective in the distance. He shows less distant scenery, and makes it a paler blue-green. The vine-covered structure in the foreground is possibly adapted from one of Cole's Italian paintings, such as Roman Campagna (Figure 11).

Church omits the figure in the foreground of Cole's painting, an artist who surveys the scene. He also leaves out the famous inscription on the distant hill -- what appear to be Hebrew letters spelling "Noah/Jehovah." Perhaps he referred to an oil sketch or engraving which did not contain these elements, and perhaps Cole made no comment to enlighten him. Church surely intended the mood to be different, however, to be less the scene of America civilizing her wilderness, and more the scene of timeless Arcadia.

Highlights on the edges of foreground forms are very
much like the treatment Cole used throughout his career, although Church applies the highlights tentatively here. He will go to the other extreme in a contemporary work, Hooker and Company (Plate 9), where he highlights the forms with abandon.

Notes

1 Page 307.
2 When he found that he would not have this series ready for the 1836 National Academy annual exhibition, Cole decided to do something that would be quick and would sell well -- a landscape:

I have already commenced a view from Mt. Holyoke it is about the finest scene I have in my sketchbook, and it is well known -- it will be novel and I think effective (Cole to Luman Reed on February 19, 1836, as quoted in Exhibition of Paintings by Thomas Cole N.A. from the Artist's Studio, Catskill, New York [exhibition catalogue, New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1964], page 5).
Plate 4

Niagara Falls (after Thomas Cole), c.1844/1846.
Oil on canvas, 36 x 39 inches.
Unsigned.

Owner: Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.


This painting bears little relation to Church's well-known representation of the falls of 1857 (Figure 14). His early Niagara Falls, like his Ox-Bow, is after a specific work by Cole which Church painted before visiting the site.

Cole's first trip to Niagara Falls had been in 1829 on the eve of his departure for Europe. He painted several views of Niagara the following year in London, including Niagara Falls (Figure 15). The first of several engravings made of this work -- Distant View of the Falls of Niagara, 1831, by Fenner Sears & Company (Figure 16) -- is probably the design source of Plate 4.

Cole's painting relates to the river landscape tradition of John Trumbull (Figure 2). Interestingly, this
painting by Trumbull was made from several on-site sketch-
es which used a horizontal panoramic format similar to
Church's acclaimed Niagara of 1857 (Figure 14). Trumbull
condensed the view in order to fit his scene onto a stan-
ard canvas. Cole seems to have done the same (Figure 15),
framing the falls with vegetation to enhance their pictur-
esque aspect.

He was deeply moved by the site, however. In May 1829,
he wrote a poem entitled "Niagara," an attempt "to recapture
the wonder with which man first viewed Niagara's grandeur." His painting of the falls (Figure 15) attempts to do the
same. He includes certain motifs which, to the British
public, were associated with American sublime scenery: the
Indian, pine tree, and eagle. A fourth, the rattlesnake,
is not visible here.

Why did Cole also include elements of the picturesque,
elements which superficially connect his work to the land-
scape tradition of Trumbull? Elizabeth McKinsey investi-
gated this tradition thoroughly. She discussed the tran-
sitory nature of the sublime emotion (which cannot be sus-
tained without dulling the senses), and she analyzed Cole's
paintings which describe the "necessary alteration of the
sublime with other states of mind." The Ox-Bow (Figure 12),
for example, is divided between beauty and fair weather on
one side, and sublimity, awesome storm cloud, and primeval
blasted tree on the other side. Cole's Niagara Falls
(Figure 15) is consistent with this philosophy; he combines
picturesque foreground scenery with distant roaring water,
and he uses rain clouds with clearing sky to symbolize "the
moment when the sublime experience is completed and re-
solved."

Niagara Falls was engraved in London (Figure 16) and
America. It was even painted on Staffordshire china by
the potters Adams and Jackson. Therefore, when Church
chose to copy Niagara Falls, he was not working with an
obscure painting by Cole, but a work which was as well known as *The Ox-Bow*.

Church's painting is an attempt to tighten the structure which he perceived in the engraving, not an attempt to heighten his teacher's symbolism. The Indians in Cole's painting are in the center foreground; Church shifts the Indians to the right along with the entire composition (in comparison to the engraving), and places the amphitheatre of water on center stage. The work contains none of Cole's sense of organic relationships -- the light that bursts from sky to water and spreads toward the viewer like a cloud, the identification of viewer with Indian observer. Nonetheless, Church demonstrates again, as in his *Ox-Bow*, an understanding of atmospheric depth; bulky dark forms in the foreground contrast nicely with luminous distance. He extends light into the lower right foreground, however, balancing the light/dark geometry of the picture, but reducing its emotional content. Trees and Indians alike have become silhouettes, inanimate landscape forms.

*Niagara Falls* is perhaps Church's first large work, and not fully successful. The roiling sky and water, for example, pull the viewer's eye into the right half of the painting without logic. Unless the lower left cliffs are vertical planes, they should be better lit under such brilliant light. The comparable cliffs in *Ox-Bow* (Plate 3) are better treated, because the atmosphere described there (like the sky in Cole's *Niagara Falls*) is tender and varied, and the cliffs are shown in the act of dissolving.

Contemporary with Church's *Niagara Falls* is an early work by Regis Gignoux, *Niagara, The Table Rock -- Winter*, 1847 (Figure 17). Church and Gignoux will become close friends at the Art-Union and will travel together to Niagara and Mount Desert Island in the early 1850's. Gignoux will eventually paint what New York critics labeled the winter pendant for Church's *Niagara*, 1857 (Figure 14): *Niagara*
Falls in Winter, 1858 (present whereabouts unknown). In 1846/1847, Church and Gignoux have comparable technical facility in their sense of composition and treatment of sky and air. However, Church has not mastered the portrayal of moving water, because he has not yet studied it.

Notes

3 Elizabeth McKinsey in Jeremy Adamson, exhibition catalogue, pages 83-86.
7 By T.S. Woodcock, New York, 1834, after the London engraving.
8 Henry Glassie, pages 96 and 107.
9 Gignoux was ten years older than Church.
10 This painting was celebrated for its delicate coloring, according to Jeremy Adamson, exhibition catalogue, page 57. It was exhibited side by side with Church's Niagara; see Cosmopolitan Art Journal 2 (September 1858), page 210.
Plate 5

Moses Viewing the Promised Land, 1846.

Oil on academy board, 9 5/8 x 12 1/2 inches.

Signed and dated 1846.

Owner: Dr. Sheldon and Jessie Stern.


Exhibition: F.E. Church, 1966, No. 143.

Bibliography: F.E. Church, 1966, pages 81 (illustration) and 82; Huntington, 1966, page 27.


Moses Viewing the Promised Land and Niagara Falls

(Plate 4) are roughly contemporary. The Biblical scene is possibly later, because it shows a more complete understanding of landscape forms under a changing sky. In fact, Moses Viewing the Promised Land makes better comparison to Cole's Niagara Falls (Figure 15) than does Church's copy. The viewer identifies at once with the lone figure of Moses, who stands on a rock outcropping pushed up into the sky. The light is seen to spread over a wondrous sight, as in Cole's Niagara Falls. It surges from behind radiant edges of clouds, across the glassy water plain, and onto brightly detailed foreground verdure.

There probably were no finished Biblical paintings in Cole's studio for the student to refer to. Cole painted works with Biblical subjects in 1825-1829 and 1843-1845, but they all seem to have been sold by 1846. They are, with one exception, somber dark paintings containing strong chiaroscuro and prominent diagonals. The exception is The Garden of Eden, 1828 (now lost). Church would have known John the Baptist, Preaching in the Wilderness, 1827 (Figure 18), the first Cole painting to be purchased
by Daniel Wadsworth. It bears little relation to Church's Moses Viewing the Promised Land, however, except for the incidental likeness of the lone figure standing on a rock.

Of more importance to Church in 1846 were his teacher's plans for a new series of large paintings, "The Cross and the World." Cole planned these in January 1846, put them aside because he had more pressing commitments, and resumed work on them in January 1847. He may have executed sketches in 1846, and encouraged his student to produce a comparable scene from the Bible. "The Cross and the World" paintings, which Cole was never able to finish, seem to have included works of horizontal format and simple massive forms (Figure 19), at once more calm and monumental than his earlier religious works.

David Huntington speculates that Church's Presbyterian and Puritan upbringing would have made illustrating an Old Testament figure more appropriate than something related to Jesus or the cross.2

As scrupulous Calvinists the Puritans of course submitted themselves to the discipline of the community . . . . While the reign of Christ was the ultimate goal of history, the individual was not to model himself directly after the Son of God. It would be presumptive to identify oneself with Jesus, the anti-type [sic]. Rather, the individual would seek to emulate the prophet of old, the type who had prefigured Jesus.3

It is interesting to note that the four Biblical works which Church is known to have done (Moses Viewing the Promised Land, *The Plague of Darkness, *The Deluge, and The Finding of Moses) all concern Old Testament subjects, and three about Moses. *The Plague of Darkness (c.1848/1849) and *The Deluge (c.1850/1851) are lost.4 See Figure 20 for The Finding of Moses, c.1860.
An important group of paintings in Cole’s studio which Church would have seen were the second set of Cole’s series, *The Voyage of Life*, 1842. These paintings remained with the artist until he sold them to George Shoenberger of Cincinnati between December 1844 and spring 1845.\(^5\) Church would have seen them almost daily for six to nine months. Especially important to *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* are *The Voyage of Life: Childhood* (Figure 21) and *The Voyage of Life: Youth* (Figure 22).

Church saw the towering outcropping of rocks in *Childhood* six years before his first visit to the rocky island of Mount Desert, Maine, in 1850. *Childhood* may have had something to do with Church’s later fascination with steep embankments of rock. At any rate, it taught him how to paint jagged masses, knowledge he was able to use in *Moses Viewing the Promised Land*. Also important for this work are Cole’s treatment of foreground forms in *Childhood* and *Youth* (Figures 21 and 22), and his juxtaposition of vegetation with glassy water in the latter painting.

Church may have used the example of Cole’s *Youth* in his splendid early sketch *Catskill Creek* (Plate 2), which shows comparable treatment of smooth water and rich vegetation. *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* repeats this treatment; here Church includes at least two mirror-smooth patches of river and considerable illumination on the edges of foreground forms. Already he is able to show a sense of depth in the clouds to match anything his teacher could do, as well as comparable atmospheric perspective on the ground.\(^6\)

The viewer feels that *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* is spacious in spite of its small size. The progression into depth in both sky and ground is essentially perpendicular to the picture plane. The protruding rock on which Moses stands, however, is pointing into space at a different angle, a movement related to the curved border; and the receding landscape planes curve around the rock, reinforcing
its presence. The composition in its entirety expresses concurrent movement from foreground into depth and from curved boundary towards the bright horizon.

Cole may have wanted to keep this painting, or it was a gift from Church to his teacher. It remained with Cole's descendants for a century after his death. Florence Cole Vincent even thought it had been painted by her grandfather when she gave it to Robert McIntyre (as part of a trade).\textsuperscript{7}

Notes

\textsuperscript{2} David Huntington in American Light, 1980, pages 159-160.
\textsuperscript{3} David Huntington, page 159.
\textsuperscript{4} See Appendix C, No.'s 11 and 23.
\textsuperscript{6} The illustration for Plate 5 shows too much light/dark contrast. See F.E. Church, 1966, page 81, for a better reproduction, especially of the clouds, which have iridescent curling rims.
\textsuperscript{7} David Huntington, F.E. Church, 1966, page 82.
Plate 6

New England Landscape with Ruined Chimney, 1846.

Oil on wood panel, 9 1/4 x 13 5/8 inches.

Signed lower left: "F. Church." Dated lower right: "June 1846."

Owner: Private Collection, Massachusetts.


Exhibition: Early Landscapes of F. E. Church, 1984, No. 1.
Illustration: Antiques 95 (February 1969), page 215 (Hirschl & Adler advertisement).

In a small notebook entitled F. E. Church Account Book 1845-1846, Church wrote that his room and board payments ($12. per month to a Mr. Thompson in Catskill, New York) had been paid in full through June 22, 1846.1 He left Catskill in midsummer, spent several months at his family's home in Hartford, and moved to New York City in the fall. There he was to live and/or work for the next several decades.

New England Landscape with Ruined Chimney must be one of the last compositions he painted while studying with Cole in Catskill. This work and Moses Viewing the Promised Land (Plate 5) are the only elliptical paintings by Church known to the author. They surely reflect Cole's interest in oval compositions in the 1840's -- for example, Catskill Landscape, 1846 (Figure 23). New England Landscape with Ruined Chimney, like Moses Viewing the Promised Land and Catskill Landscape, uses the oval shape and certain curved elements of the composition to lead the viewer's eye along a curved path around the focus. The arc of tiny birds in Plate 6, for instance, describes a circle around the ruined chimney.
Why did Church paint this ruin? He painted no other early work known to the author which focuses on ruined architecture. Two compositions from this period portray other kinds of ruins: *Blasted Tree*, 1849 (Plate 21), and *An Old Boat*, 1851/1852 (Plate 30). Church's lone adventure in painting romantic ruins can be credited to Cole's influence. Cole painted countless studies of decayed architecture, and his unsuccessful experience with patrons for these desolate scenes perhaps also steered the pupil away from serious treatment of them. Church would be familiar with Cole's later Italian paintings, which all contain ruins. Cole painted the large *Mount Etna from Taormina*, 1843 (Figure 24), for Daniel Wadsworth, who placed it in a central location at the Athenæum for the 1844 opening. It is not known whether Church saw his teacher's earlier Italian paintings, although the ruined "chimney" in Plate 6 does resemble the left tower in Cole's 1832 work, *Aqueduct near Rome* (Figure 10).

In 1846 Cole was working on a large painting for Charles Leupp, *Kenilworth Castle* (now lost), which he exhibited at the National Academy of Design in March 1847 (see Figure 25 for one of the working drawings). It may have been this current project that gave Church the idea for his small painting. The composition of Church's work, moreover, resembles two early oil sketches by Cole which were in the studio at the time: *Study for "Course of Empire: Desolation"*, c.1832 (Figure 26), and *Study for "Genevieve"*, c.1838 (Figure 27). Each of these is an oil on panel study of ruined tower and water, as is Church's *New England Landscape with Ruined Chimney*. Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York, gave this work its present title in 1968, but probably it is an imaginary scene, as are Cole's studies.

Church was to remark later in life that if he could own any three landscapes he had ever seen, one would certainly be *Desolation* from the "Course of Empire."² Why
did he not attempt something like this himself? Here his teacher's attitude is crucial. In 1827 Cole had prepared a long list of subjects which he hoped to paint, and one of the subjects was "Ruin or the effects of time."³ From a study of Cole's notes and sketchbooks, it appears that the subject was attached to his oil study Desolation (Figure 26), and that this study germinated his entire "Course of Empire" series.⁴ Church too seems to have understood that the climax of the series was not the Consummation painting, but Desolation. He also must have understood that "desolate" landscapes in general occupied an important part of Cole's list of subjects, a part devoted to illustrating famous romances.

These illustrations proved to be a problem for Cole, for he wished to express the mood of desolation in the landscape itself. His patrons, however, expected to see real people expressing this emotion. Since Cole disdained painting the human figure, he had to make an unpleasant choice: he either included figures and pleased his patron (as in Course of Empire for Luman Reed), or he left them out and failed to sell the work (as in Genevieve).⁵

Church seems to have learned early that landscapes in which figures were subordinate would be acceptable to the nineteenth-century American public only if they were views of actual places. America offered few ruined buildings to paint, so the subject did not develop for Church until his later career, when he visited ruins in South America, Europe, and the Near East.

One question remains to be answered: why did Cole disdain to paint the human figure, a disdain which his pupil shared and perhaps learned from him? Cole mentioned throughout his life that he admired the seventeenth-century French landscapist Claude above all other painters. He even made a point in 1832 to stay in the house in Rome where Claude had once lived and painted. Cole may have
chosen to ignore the example of significant human figures in Claude's work because of his own early unhappy and unsuccessful experience as an itinerant portraitist in the Midwest in the early 1820's.

Notes

1 This notebook and another which records his expenses for 1844-1845 are among the Church papers at Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.
2 The author has been unable to find a letter or other document which contains this remark. It is quoted in Exhibition of Paintings by Thomas Cole N.A. from the Artist's Studio, Catskill, New York (exhibition catalogue, New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1964), page 14.
3 See Baltimore Museum of Art Annual II, 1967, pages 82-101, for a reproduction of his list, with comments by Howard S. Merritt.
4 See the Kennedy exhibition catalogue, 1964, page 14.
5 According to the Kennedy catalogue, page 14, Cole never completed the painting:

In January 1838, T.H. Faile gave Cole a commission for a landscape with figures. Cole suggested the parting of Medora and Conrad, from Byron's "The Corsair," a subject accepted by Mr. Faile. Cole's inclination to make the figures subordinate to the landscape in his paintings did not meet with Faile's approval, however, and Cole suggested . . . [the illustration of Coleridge's "Genevieve"]. Cole was not able to complete this subject. He wrote Asher B. Durand in May of that year: "In fact I commenced with sweet Genevieve & her Lover & have ended with a Solitary Tower & Shepherd Boy looking dead into the moon's eye. -- My subject was Swamped -- I must attempt something else for Mr. Faile . . . . [Cole eventually painted for Faile two landscapes with European settings.]
Plate 7

View of Quebec, 1846.

Oil on canvas, 22 1/4 x 30 1/4 inches.

Signed and dated lower left center: "F. Church/10/1846."


Provenance: Source unknown before 1850.

Exhibition: Hudson River School, 1976, No. 20.


Daniel Wadsworth was Thomas Cole's most enduring patron and the only patron who supplied Cole with drawings and watercolors of his own which Cole actually copied. Wadsworth would do the same for Frederic Church. It was either Wadsworth's drawing (now lost) or an engraving based on his drawing (Figure 28) which provided the design for View of Quebec.

Church most likely painted View of Quebec in the summer or early autumn of 1846 when he was in Hartford. Nancy Troy speculates that Wadsworth commissioned "this painterly transposition" of his own early sketch. If so, he surely would have made the sketch itself available to Church, unless it was already lost.

Wadsworth made the sketch and a number of others in 1819, during a trip with Benjamin Silliman from Hartford to Quebec and back. Nine of these were engraved the following year by Simeon Jocelyn, a New Haven artist, to be included in Silliman's book: Remarks Made, On a Short Tour, Between Hartford and Quebec, 1820. These small spare sketches, like Quebec (Figure 5), indicate that Wadsworth had an excellent sense for balance and weight in his compositions. They were apparently similar in style to the travel sketches he had been making since 1799.
Quebec from the Chaudière, Setting Sun (Figure 28) seems to be the starting point for Church's painting, although, of course, it is impossible to say whether Church worked from the Wadsworth drawing or this engraving. It is almost a certainty, however, that Church read Silliman's book. The treatment of light in View of Quebec closely follows the writing:

[This view] was not to be exceeded in beauty by anything that we saw in Canada . . . . [Quebec, "Gibraltar of America"] was seen by the mildest, softest light . . . and there was a mellowness in the tints . . . which excited still stronger perceptions of beauty. The impressions were heightened by contrast with the deep black gulf.4

View of Quebec, then, is another of Church's youthful paintings which he prepared after a topographical work by someone else, without having seen the site. He seems to start with the engraved design, adding more foliage to the trees -- especially the one to the left --, intensifying the contrast between dark foreground and pale distance, and increasing the mass of land in the foreground. Here he adds rocks, fallen tree, foliage, and flowers. Such changes "enhance the picturesque aspect of the scene, emphasizing the essentially untamed character of the natural landscape as it was described by Silliman."5 Church also highlights the edges of forms in the foreground, just as Cole would do.

His treatment of atmospheric depth, however, is his own, based on Silliman's description and on what he had learned from Cole. Church begins with close observation of natural aerial phenomena, using pale pastels in the most distant planes to express aerial distance. He then alters the natural hues, producing a dream-like landscape.
The sky is colorless for most of its height, changing to clear yellow at the horizon. Pale pink-lavender mountains separate the yellow sky from smooth yellow water at this point. Nearer to the foreground are mauve diagonal shadows. These and the shimmering planes beyond provide delectable contrast to the opaque black foreground. Church also adds a few small birds in flight near the left tree. Their curving pattern adds to the sense of limitless space beyond.

The treatment of sky and water in this painting, like that in a contemporary work, *Hooker and Company* . . . (Plate 9) needs to be appreciated in the original work. There are no visible brushstrokes in sky and water. These elements appear to be mirrored glass which reflects a distant surreal atmosphere, glass on which the foreground forms are painted.

Notes

1 Hudson River School, 1976, page 41.
2 Benjamin Silliman (1799-1864) was Wadsworth's brother-in-law, and the first professor of geology at Yale.
There seems to be little doubt that Rapids of the Susquehanna is based directly on a watercolor by Wadsworth: Ferry at Columbia -- Pens1 on the Susquehannah [sic], no date (Figure 29), which he painted some years before on a trip to Pennsylvania. It has been suggested that Church prepared his work after an engraving of the watercolor, but no engraving has yet been discovered.1 In 1846 this watercolor was in Wadsworth's private collection. He probably commissioned the painting from Church, who may have worked on it in Hartford during the summer of 1846 concurrently with View of Quebec (Plate 7) and *Hooker and Company ... (Plate 9).

Although View of Quebec and Rapids of the Susquehanna are the same size, each based on Wadsworth compositions, and similar in subject matter (views over water), they are in no sense pendants.2 Rapids of the Susquehanna germinates the treatment of space which Church will repeat in several of his finest early works: *View near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1847 (Plate 18), *Above the Clouds at Sunrise, 1849 (Plate 22), and *An Old Boat, 1851/1852 (Plate 30). This treatment postulates atmospheric depth as a series of transparent membranes parallel to the picture plane. The membrane closest to the viewer contains clouds which are coarse and ephemeral, shown in the act of
dissolving or pulling apart. The succeeding membranes contain elements which are fine-textured and increasingly light-filled.

Rapids of the Susquehanna is Church's first attempt at this treatment, here heavily indebted to Cole. Church begins with the rhythmic horizontal design provided by Wadsworth's watercolor. He then wraps foreground tree and clouds around the center as Cole did in countless oil studies for The Voyage of Life: Manhood (Figure 30, for example) and in several of his more dramatic finished works like Course of Empire: The Savage State, 1836 (Figure 31). Church may also have patterned his foreground trees after the trees shown in The Savage State, or after any number of his teacher's trees. On close examination, the lower foreground resembles that in Hooker and Company... (Plate 9), a tangle of tree roots and shrubbery. Church does not highlight much of the foreground material, however, in Rapids of the Susquehanna. Emphasis is clearly on deep space. The viewer reads the painting from top into depth and from bottom into depth, passing into a tunnel of color and distant light. Cole never achieved the feeling of deep space which Church produces here.

Tiny figures on a raft in the rapids and a figure standing on the bank watching them are barely visible in the painting itself, and impossible to find in Plate 8. Church's intent may have been to exaggerate the power of nature by including small figures, but the tiny forms act only as pointers in space, like Durand's cows, and do not contribute a sense of danger. There are birds in the painting (not visible in Plate 8) which fly from the foreground tree toward the raft; they too help punctuate the convincing sense of depth. It is the sky and water, however, which command the viewer's attention. The heavy foreground clouds are charcoal gray and coarse, a palatable contrast to the tender white and blue distant sky and the
pale yellow water.

Notes

1 This suggestion is made in Hudson River School, 1976, page 40, and refuted in Daniel Wadsworth, 1981, page 104.

2 Today they hang next to each other in the Atheneum, where their differences are striking.

3 The oil studies were in Cole's studio at the time; the 1836 Course of Empire paintings were already on display at the New-York Historical Society.
Plate 9

*Hooker and Company Journeying through the Wilderness from Plymouth to Hartford, in 1636, 1846.

Oil on canvas, 40 1/4 x 60 1/4 inches.

Signed and dated lower left: "F. Church/8/1846."


Provenance: Possibly purchased by the Wadsworth Atheneum from the artist for $130. (in 1846); source unknown before 1850.


*Hooker and Company Journeying through the Wilderness from Plymouth to Hartford, in 1636 is the earliest extant painting by Church to have been exhibited at the National Academy of Design. The subject was No. 74 on Cole's list of possible subjects for painting. Apparently Church worked on it in the fall of 1845, placed it in the exhibition of March 1846 under Cole's direction, and continued to rework it during the following summer and fall. Since this painting is held to be Church's student masterpiece, painted to show what he had learned during his two years with Cole, it is helpful to review this period as related by Charles Dudley Warner:
In the second year of Church's stay Cole had taken two other pupils, E.M. McConkey and John Stempfort Kidney, and the three had delightful times together. Church began to show some inclination toward historical subjects. The past of his native state naturally appealed to him in this connection. His first notable work while with Cole was a picture of "The Charter Oak" [Appendix B, No. 1], painted in 1845 and sold to the American Art-Union for its distribution of 1847. He had gained some proficiency in painting the human figure, and he projected a somewhat ambitious canvas representing a scene in the foundation of Connecticut, "The Emigration of Hooker." The home circle was deeply interested in his intentions with this subject, and one of his sister Elizabeth's letters to him in the autumn of 1845 was devoted to an account of her efforts to look up the costumes of the period at the library in Hartford . . . . [Another] picture that he early had in mind was a "Rip Van Winkle." But he soon found that landscape was more to his taste. . . .

His father continued distrustful of the career that he had chosen, and sent his remittances somewhat grudgingly. In one letter he remarks that he has little confidence in the "business" which he has entered upon in meeting the expenses for a young man's maintenance. Something that Charlotte [his younger sister] wrote about a proposition of their father to suspend Frederic's art studies that he might go through college filled her brother with consternation. A panic-stricken letter to his father showed that art had become as meat and drink to him. . . . [The father at length decided] not to oppose the course that might be thought best, if they had good evidence at the end [of his stay in Catskill] . . . that he had made progress in what he had undertaken. So he trusted that his son would persevere with his business with all diligence . . . .2

Surely Church meant to show his father some good progress with this painting. Such an intention, in combination with rather parochial subject matter, might almost predetermine a stiff, overstaged painting. Indeed, one scholar has called Hooker and Company stiff and overstaged. Its subject matter and critical response will be
treated shortly. The great merit of the work is its crystalline and radiant sense of space, but it stops just short of being a hodgepodge of Cole motifs.

Church chose as his subject the migration of about one hundred Puritans from Cambridge (not Plymouth) to the site on the Connecticut River which would become Hartford, in 1636. They were led by the preacher Thomas Hooker, who was born in England and fled to Holland and then to America. He joined the Puritans of the Boston area, and seems to have shared the religious and political viewpoints of John Winthrop and John Cotton. Hooker apparently chose to separate from the Boston group in 1636 and take a few followers west for economic, not religious, reasons. Various sections of the Boston group had already separated and moved west to find more fertile farmland, and the Hooker group did the same. In the popular literature of Connecticut, however, Hooker and his band were honored as the first people in America to migrate west -- people who, like Moses and his followers, had made a covenant with God in a new land.

Matthew Baigell describes the nationalist sentiment in New England of the 1840's, and convincingly argues that Church's painting is part of a cluster of nationalistic images. The 1840's saw the first great influx of Irish immigrants to New England, the first organized labor unrest on the East Coast, and the first strong indication that western States were overtaking the East in political clout. "A growing number of orators and writers began to call for reminders of the area's great contributions to both the founding and the idea of America." The great romantic historian George Bancroft wrote his History of the United States "to follow the steps by which a favoring Providence . . . has conducted the country to its present happiness and glory."

Church's painting is a landscape illustration of Providence guiding the chosen people to their new land.
Nancy Troy mentions that the painting "reflects the influence of Cole's attitude . . . that human drama helps to define and rationalize the landscape environment." However, the drama expressed by the figures here is of minimal importance, and seems staged—a stately single-file procession of women and children who ride and men who walk. Certain figures resemble Cole's Flight into Egypt groups (which appear as miniature forms in paintings like John the Baptist, Figure 18). Church shows knowledge of the historical people he portrays; Hooker's wife (who was unable to walk) is shown in a litter, for example. Nonetheless, the figures complement the mood of the landscape without really dramatizing it. In this he is closer to what Cole learned from his own experience in painting than to what Cole indicated in the projected list of subjects of 1827. For in fact Cole, like Church, used the landscape, not the figures, to express the drama. Church's Hooker and Company is a product of his teacher's lifelong attitude to landscape.

Cole's influence is also present in the composition. The scene is framed with foreground vegetation which gives it a crescent-shaped base (as in Figure 31, Course of Empire: The Savage State), and the tree trunks and roots are anthropomorphic. These were to Cole the real human forms in landscape. In Church's work they make convincing "spectators." The rays of sunlight may also come from Cole. The Cross and the World (Figure 19) and Newstead Abbey at Sunrise (Figure 32) contain these fanshaped forms; both paintings could have been in progress at the time.

Church's manner of highlighting the foreground trees, however, seems to have another source. He applies paint liberally in small snowflake patterns over the vegetation. He might have been adapting the treatment of leaves in Landscape with Covered Wagon of 1821 by Thomas Birch (Figure 33). This application of light, which seems to the author to have been done with abandon, tends to make all
the foreground forms resemble lace flattened against a pane of glass, through which the splendid sky and water appear all the more remarkable. These elements, as in View of Quebec (Plate 7), are painted with a brushless finish which fully conceals the weave of the canvas. Small clouds just above the sun appear to be suspended between the viewer's eye and the infinite distance beyond. The initial impact of this painting on the viewer is the sense of radiant air with the light source at its center, leading the viewer's eye forward into the landscape (by way of the still water), and to the left into lacy dreamlike wilderness.

David Huntington says:

In this rather overstaged and cardboard-planed landscape, the sharp and pure vision of the previous landscapes has been pressed into a rather clumsily classical composition. The painting is a motley of studies which have been brought together into a whole which is neither convincing as nature nor harmonious as art. But The Hooker Party is to be respected as a juvenile attempt on Church's part to be a Claude Lorrain in the American wilderness.8

There is a sense of cardboard planes in this landscape, and the sense that it is not convincing as nature, but there is also a great sense of harmony and art which reproductions of the work fail to reveal. If the painting is viewed in a darkened room with just enough overhead lighting to illuminate it, the viewer has the illusion that he is looking beyond the dark room into a very special sunlit environment.

Hooker and Company is the first painting recorded as sold by the artist. Church wrote Cole October 17, 1846: "Some of the gentlemen connected with the Wadsworth Gallery are trying to purchase my Hooker picture. This I have improved by glazing, etc."9 Huntington cites a letter owned
by the Wadsworth Atheneum (Mrs. Horace Wells to her husband, December 27, 1846) as proof that Church sold Hooker and Company to the Atheneum for $130., but there is no receipt of this transaction in the Wadsworth Atheneum Archives Account Book. ¹⁰ One transaction the Account Book does record is the donation of thirty dollars for a frame, January 20, 1847, by Joseph Church, the artist's father. ¹¹

Notes

² Warner, 1900 (based on Church's lost memoirs).
³ Baigell, page 124.
⁴ Baigell, pages 124-125.
⁵ Baigell, page 125.
⁶ George Bancroft, History of the United States, tenth edition (Boston: Little and Brown, 1842), page 4, as quoted in Baigell, page 125.
⁹ Quoted in Huntington, 1966, page 82.
¹⁰ Huntington, 1960, page 23.
Plate 10

Catskill Sunset, c.1846.
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 inches.
Unsigned.
Owner: Private Collection.

Provenance: Source unknown before c.1979;

Illustrations: Alexander Gallery advertisements --
Antiques 116 (October 1979), page 724 (color);
Arts 54 (November 1979), page 35 (color).

Church may have painted Catskill Sunset shortly
after his 1845 visit to the Berkshire Hills of western
Massachusetts (about thirty-five miles from Catskill).
In 1845 Cole was working on The Hunter's Return, which
Church surely knew (Figures 34 and 35). Catskill Sunset
contains motifs associated with Cole: evergreen and de-
ciduous trees silhouetted together in the sky, log cabin,
and leaning tree. Church adds a centered pool of water
which visually lowers the horizon line, removes the human
figures, and introduces a dominant sky. The multicolored
layers of clouds in Catskill Sunset appear to rush back
into space and push the horizon line down. Church will
take great pleasure in developing this kind of motion-
filled sky during the next decade; *Morning, 1847/1848
(Plate 16), Beacon off Mount Desert, 1851 (Plate 29), and
*Mt. Katahdn, 1853 (Plate 36), are good examples.

Catskill Sunset may reflect the influence of members
of the National Academy who ritually painted the times of
day. Durand painted at least one Morning or Sunset every
season, 1840-1850: Landscape, Composition, Morning --
The Morning of Life, 1840 (National Academy of Design,
New York), and Close of a Sultry Day, Evening, Landscape,
c.1844 (Art Association of Richmond, Indiana), for instance.
These paintings frequently use a composition similar to
Catskill Sunset: low horizon, central pool of water, and foreground verdure which frames one or both sides. Durand's evening skies, however, are luminous and fine-textured; they do not contain the ribbons of color which Church uses here.
Plate 11
*Christian on the Borders of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death," Pilgrim's Progress, c.1847.

Oil on canvas, 40 1/2 x 60 1/2 inches.

Unsigned.


Provenance: The artist (until 1900); Louis Palmer Church (his son); Sally Good (Mrs. Louis Palmer) Church (until 1964).

Exhibitions: "Annual Exhibition," No. 84, National Academy of Design, New York (Spring 1847); F.E. Church, 1966, No. 144.

Bibliography: Literary World 1 (June 5, 1847), page 419; Cowdrey, 1943, page 80; Huntington, 1960, pages 22-23; F.E. Church, 1966, pages 82 and 84; Curator's file, Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York (OL.1981.50).


In the fall of 1846 Church moved to New York City, where he boarded briefly with his maternal uncle Adrian Janes and then found suitable bachelor quarters of his own. He acquired studio space in the Art-Union Building (497 Broadway), where he would paint until 1858. After that time, he moved to the Studio Building on Tenth Street.

By all accounts, Church was a personable, considerate young man. Warner says:

... in his practical application of his religion to the conduct of life, Christianity was above all the gospel of love. He was invariably thoughtful of others, ever doing for others, and no enjoyment was ever complete unless it could be shared by others. This, indeed, was the underlying motive in what for him was his supreme enjoyment -- the practice of his art -- in which his aim was to share with his fellows his own realization of the beauty and the grandeur of the world about him.2
From the moment Church arrived in New York, he blossomed. The next ten years would be the most intense period of production in his life. His work immediately attracted attention and "he was soon on a self-supporting basis." However, he continued to write and visit Cole regularly, and produced the most Cole-like paintings of his career this first year in New York.

Church probably painted *Christian on the Borders of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death," Pilgrim's Progress over the winter of 1846/1847. It is a fitting first painting for the period. Church may have felt that he resembled the young pilgrim Christian, beginning his life's journey in a city filled with temptations. He kept the work with him for the rest of his life.

*Christian is a large dark painting whose drama is carried by the landscape. It could be mistaken for an allegorical work by Cole. The choice of subject from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress connects the work immediately to Cole's Voyage of Life series. The metaphor for each is the same: life is a journey fraught with danger which the traveller survives with God's grace.

In an oil study for the painting, Church blocks out a design which looks like a photo negative of one of his daylight landscapes (Figure 36); tree and foreground are light rather than dark, and the central wedge of light which should lead the viewer's eye to a distant sun has been replaced by opaque black. This scene is more mysterious than the lurid final painting, in which he reverses the position of the large tree, light source, and rocks.

In the final work he gathers a multitude of images from Cole. Any one of the many studies for The Voyage of Life: Manhood provides Church with the large oval in the composition, the tunnel of storm clouds, streak of light over the ocean, and rocks. The skeletal anthropomorphic tree and lone figure relate strongly to forms in Cole's
early works (Figures 37 and 38), and especially to View of White Mountains (Figure 38), which was commissioned by Wadsworth and displayed prominently in the Atheneum. Like View of White Mountains, Christian contains a small figure which leads the eye between tree and focus. The focus in Christian is a waterspout in the middle distance, painted blood red. This waterspout may be Church's reference to the great recurrent fear of the hero Christian -- going to hell -- and to his eventual death in this river. Rose pink highlights at the base of the tree also lead the viewer's eye toward the waterspout (see Figure 39 for a view of the painting in its present location -- Studio Wing at Olana, completed in 1888. Christian is above the bookcase, upper left corner).

The highlighting of foreground forms in Christian differs slightly from Cole's treatment. The forms are more minutely incised here, without the thick edges of Vermeer-like crusts of light that Cole used. Church lightens the entire surface of miniscule leaves and particles on the top of each foreground section, and paints the next layer of forms slightly darker, creating a translucent carpet of miniature lace-like forms which show a sense of depth -- little landscapes in miniature.

Church received what may be the first critical notice of his career, after Christian and *July Sunset* (Plate 12) appeared in the 1847 National Academy exhibition. The Literary World said: "... time and experience will enable him to take rank with our best landscape painters."

A year later, Church would paint another scene from Pilgrim's Progress: *River of the Water of Life*, now lost. He may have initiated a rage among young artists at the Art-Union to paint scenes from Pilgrim's Progress. The Bulletin for August 1850 mentions a plan for painting large cloth banners with scenes from Pilgrim's Progress to be designed by the more accomplished artists like
Frederic Church, Daniel Huntington, and Jasper Cropsey, and to be executed by other artists at the Art-Union. By 1850, it seems, Cropsey had painted illustrations for *River of the Water of Life* and *The Land That Is Called Beulah*, and Huntington had painted and sold pictures of *Christiana and Her Children* and *Mercy's Dream*.

The anonymous *Bulletin* critic continued:

> We like the spirit in which these five or six young men have contributed to this work. It shows that they are superior to the vulgar notion that it is the character of the materials upon which depends the dignity of any undertaking in Art. They know well it is rather the idea they are to seek to develop which will ennoble their productions... whether they are executed in enduring fresco, or, like this panorama, with common house paints on poor thin cotton cloth. Raphael and Leonardo, and the great masters of the Italian school, did not hesitate to adorn the contemporary scenery... which were arranged for street processions and civic festivities. . . .

The December 1850 *Bulletin* contained a brief notice that the panorama had been a success: "The views of the *Water of Life* (from designs of Church, we believe) . . . are alone worth the price of admission."

---

**Notes**

1 Warner, 1900.
2 Warner, 1900.
3 Warner, 1900.
4 The full title of the work published by John Bunyan in 1678 is *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which Is to Come: Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream.*
At the end of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and his companion Hopeful drown in the River of Death, but the water carries them to Paradise.

See Appendix C, No. 8.


*Bulletin* (August 1850), page 82.

*Bulletin* (August 1850), page 82.

*Bulletin* (December 1850), page 156.
Plate 12

*July Sunset,* 1847.

Oil on canvas, 29 x 40 inches.

Signed and dated lower center: "F. Church 1847."

Owner: Private Collection, Michigan.

Provenance: Adrian Janes (Church's maternal uncle),
New York (from 1847); John Astor, New York;
Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc., New York (until
October 27, 1978), lot 16.


Bibliography: Literary World 1 (June 5, 1847), page 419;

Illustration: Antiques 114 (September 1978), page 360
(Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc., color advertisement).

David Huntington called this work "strikingly Cole-like." 

*July Sunset* does reveal the influence of Cole's late landscapes. For the composition, Church may have had in mind *Old Mill at Sunset,* 1844 (Figure 40), which shows a setting sun behind foreground trees, and a curving path on the ground at the base of the trees. He may also have adapted his pine tree from *Home in the Woods,* 1847 (Figure 41), one of Cole's final works. Church will use the scraggly pine trees in this painting by Cole again and again during the next two years.

*July Sunset* is an interesting combination of both painters' techniques. Church highlights the foreground forms as in Christian on the Borders ... (Plate 11), but he uses Cole's style of highlighting on the edges of tree trunks. The powerful backlighting differs slightly from Cole's treatment, which was usually more selective (see *Old Mill at Sunset,* Figure 40). Church will use more selective backlighting in the future. In *Andes of Ecuador,* 1855 (Figures 42 and 43), Church uses backlit verdure only
around the cross. This creates a clear and tranquil environment to contrast with hazy white light elsewhere. In *July Sunset* there is less a sense of variety under the hot sun.

This work is apparently one of Church's earliest paintings of a specific place, drawn on site. The vibrant gold sky and strong light seem to recreate a certain sunset, void of overt symbolism. According to Warner, Church felt that he was a realist follower of a great symbolist poet and painter:

... the romanticist was the master and the realist was the pupil; and the realist, doubtless largely because of this fact, achieved a technique which attained the ends, not of literalism, which is quite another matter, but of a lucid representation of nature in her truest guise, by the most delicate, intricate, and almost intangible processes.

... 

It was a remarkable conjunction, that of the two artists -- each the master of his day in landscape painting; one practically the founder of the art in America, utilizing the forms of inanimate nature as symbols to express some of the most sublime imaginings and aspirations of the human soul; the other destined soon to be likewise the unrivaled master of landscape art on this side of the Atlantic, paying homage to nature in the striving to present her in her most perfect moods.2

In fact, Church's manner of composing was highly selective, and his finished works invariably composite. To create *July Sunset*, he combines one of his drawings for *Charter Oak*, c.1847 (Plate 15), several of Cole's rocks and pine trees, and a singular orange sunset which he had sketched in the Berkshire Hills a year before. This
seems to be his method of composing for the rest of his life: "to cut up . . . sketchbooks and even some of the larger drawings in order to shuffle them about to fit his needs of the moment." The topographical landscapes like *July Sunset are in fact as imaginary as Christian on the Borders of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death".

Notes

1 Huntington, 1960, page 23.
2 Warner, 1900.
3 Richard Wunder, Preface to F.E. Church, 1966, page 12.
Plate 13
Van Vechten House, Catskill, New York, 1847.
Oil on canvas, 22 x 30 inches.
Signed and dated lower right: "F Church/1847."
Provenance: The artist (until 1900); Louis Palmer Church (his son); Sally Good (Mrs. Louis Palmer) Church (until 1964).

The element cadmium was discovered in the early years of the nineteenth century. By the 1840's, artists were beginning to use pigments containing cadmium oxides and other compounds of the metal, which produced intense shades of yellow, orange, and red.¹ Church may have tried these colors while with Cole, but his extant works indicate that he started using cadmium orange and yellow in 1847.

It is now thought that Van Vechten House is quite possibly the painting which Church exhibited at the Art-Union in 1847 entitled *Scene on the Catskill Creek, New York.*² The Art-Union purchased this work from Church for distribution in December 1847, and it was won by Leffert T. Bergen of New York.³ When and why Church bought the work back is unknown.

The house in the painting has been firmly identified as the Van Vechten House, built in the late seventeenth century near Catskill by a Dutch-born farmer, Dirck Van Vechten (1634–1702), on land acquired in part from two
Catskill Indians. The house underwent several renovations in the next century, remaining in the family until 1835. A Van Vechten reacquired it in 1872.\textsuperscript{4}

Church sketched the house in August 1845 while living in Catskill (Figure 44). The sketch, as well as the history of the house, indicates that it was not a romantic ruin but probably one of the more picturesque examples of Hudson River homes. Cole frequently included this kind of red-gabled brick house in his late Catskill landscapes. River in the Catskills, 1843 (Figure 7), and Catskill Landscape, 1846 (Figure 23), contain tiny specimens, which seem to represent simply the presence of civilized man in nature.

The house will become as important a landscape form to Church as trees were to Cole. Cole used his tree forms as struggling protagonists in a drama. The house in Church's hands is somewhat more passive: it becomes the face of the landscape. By the time he paints *Twilight, Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and Night*, 1850 (Plate 24), he has learned to compact expressive strength into a tiny glowing house which looks at the viewer and also directs the viewer's visual path through the composition.

Van Vechten House is carefully composed to look naturalistic. Church now defines landscape as a collection of directional, curvilinear forms within the ground plane, the approach which was implicit in his View of Hartford (Plate 1). He subtly alters the proportions of Van Vechten House when he translates the sketch into paint, so that the viewer approaches the house from below its ground level. One can trace an oval path by following the creek around to the base of the tree, through a horizontal shadow leading to the front of the house, out through the side face, and back into the foreground creek. This is a lush rounded natural environment.

However, the long horizontal shadow is not true to
nature, considering the direction of the setting sun. The house itself is lit as though another sun were spotlighting it from the left in the viewer's space. This second light source also highlights leaves of foreground verdure and the tree in front of the house. Perhaps Church uses this special lighting to indicate the end of a very special day, a day not to be understood in terms of ordinary time. This is what he will do in *Twilight, Short Arbiter*. . . . (Plate 24), which relates to an allegory that educated people in the nineteenth century would clearly recognize. The author has been unable to determine whether the Van Vechten landscape also pays tribute to such an allegory.

Notes


2 James Ryan, letter to the author.

3 See also Appendix C, No. 4.

4 Peter Cook, pages 392-396. The Van Vechten House was restored again in the 1940's, and is now equipped with appropriate Hudson Valley and New England furnishings.
Plate 14

North Lake, 1847.

Oil on canvas, 12 x 19 inches.

Signed and dated lower right: "F Church/1847."


Provenance: Source unknown before 1940; Mrs. Palma Michaelis, Washington, New Jersey (1940); Mrs. Antoinette Franke (her daughter), Hacketstown, New Jersey (until 1963).


North Lake is a highly-finished oil study of the lake near Catskill Mountain House which Cole often visited and sketched. The painting appears to be made directly from nature and yet to attempt a more general statement about water and sky. Perhaps North Lake was inspired by Cole's "Essay on American Scenery," 1835: ". . . the reflections of surrounding objects, trees, mountains, sky, are most perfect in the clearest water; and the most perfect is the most beautiful."¹

The beauty of clear water was a popular sentiment at the time. Emerson had described clear water in 1840 as God's eye medicine, "God's Drop."² Thoreau was working on Walden in the late 1840's, and writing: [the pond] helps to wash out State-street and the engine's soot."³

North Lake may be indebted to a painting which Cole finished in late 1847: Home in the Woods (Figure 41). Church's treatment of foreground forms and his composition are similar, his water even more transparent. However,
the clean expanse of sky and water in North Lake is not complemented by rich vegetation (as in Catskill Creek, Plate 2). The North Lake water serves to double the prickly effect of dead needle-like vegetation.

Church will paint relatively few finished works which contain autumnal scenery. These, mostly from the period of the late 1850's, will have a more pleasing combination of heavy russet trees and moist twilight air. These, too, will be indebted to Cole's work (see Figure 45 for one of the teacher's most evocative portrayals of autumn: Morning Mists Rising, Plymouth, New Hampshire, c.1829/1831).

Notes

2 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal (April 9, 1840), volume 5, page 381.
4 One example is Autumn Landscape, formerly New Hampshire Landscape, c.1856, Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, New York.
Plate 15

Charter Oak, c.1847.

Oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 39 inches.

Unsigned.


Provenance: The artist (until 1900); Louis Palmer Church (his son); Sally Good (Mrs. Louis Palmer) Church (until 1964).


This painting, like Hooker and Company (Plate 9), relates to the nationalist sentiment in New England during the 1840's. The "Charter Oak" of Hartford was one of the popular patriotic images of the time. Church's family and friends seem to have had special interest in the Charter Oak, and may have suggested that the artist paint the tree. His father, Joseph Church, was a founder of Aetna Insurance Company, whose advertising motif for the next century would be the Charter Oak. Daniel Wadsworth's family helped to create the legend of the tree. This legend, although interesting, is somewhat lengthy. A summary follows.

Thomas Hooker and his group had journeyed west in 1636 by following Indian trails. These trails led to the Connecticut River, which the group forded. They decided to settle on the west bank near a landmark oak tree. The Indians called this the "Peace Tree." They continued to hold meetings under it until mid-century, when they were driven away by the settlers.

In 1662 Hartford received a royal charter giving the Colony of Connecticut almost total sovereignty. Twenty-five years later, James II sent Sir Edmund Andros to New England as Governor; his first order was to rescind the
liberal Connecticut charter. Andros met with local administrators in Hartford, and was presented the charter at a candlelit evening meeting. The charter lay on the table. Suddenly the lights blew out, and the charter disappeared. No one in the royal group could find it in the ensuing weeks of search. Joseph Wadsworth (great great great uncle of Daniel Wadsworth) had hidden it in the hollow center of the Peace Tree, which was renamed "Charter Oak."

By the time Church was a young man, the city of Hartford had grown up around the tree. It had been a frequent subject for painters, who reproduced stock images of a stalwart oak tree. Daniel Wadsworth rejected the portrayal of Charter Oak as just another leafy tree. He made a drawing of the tree in winter, to emphasize its singular anthropomorphic muscled structure, and to symbolize his own family and civic ancestry. In 1818 he asked a local artist and carriage-maker, George Francis, to translate his drawing into paint (Figure 46), a work which Church probably knew.

Church sketched the tree from nature, acting on Cole's general advice to reproduce what he saw; but his selection of viewpoint (the south view of the tree) matched the view in Wadsworth's sketch. He drew the Charter Oak in October 1845 (Figure 47) and again in August-September 1846. The 1845 drawing appears to have been the working sketch for both of the known Charter Oak paintings by Church: *The Charter Oak at Hartford (c.1845) and the painting illustrated here.* This second painting is the well-known version, and is sometimes confused with the earlier work.

The second painting (Plate 15) presents the famous tree in a meadow setting -- which would be an imaginary setting in Hartford in the 1840's, but appropriate for an idealized tree, a tree which had come to represent God's special intervention for the citizens of Hartford. Church seems to understand the muscular structure of the tree as in
the Wadsworth drawing, and to combine this understanding with an idealized portrayal of an oak tree. Note that, in comparison to the drawing (Figure 47), the finished tree has a taller trunk which tilts, and has branches which push emphatically upward.

By 1847 he was demonstrating full command of Cole's painting technique. Charter Oak is an interesting combination of Cole's influence and his own painting experience in 1846-1847. The forms are highlighted as in Christian on the Borders . . . (Plate 11) and *July Sunset (Plate 12); the sense of pale clear air is the same as in Hooker and Company (Plate 9).

Church may have sketched the tree from nature, but he produces a work which uses the landscape to tell a story, like Hooker and Company. The tree appears to beckon to its smaller neighbor, just as the mother and child (to the right of the trunk) communicate. The land beyond is gentle and quiet. The river in the distance is reduced to a tiny divider between fertile fields. Most important, the central form in the landscape, the tree, leads the viewer's eye into the open clear air, as if it were telling the viewer about the pleasures of being "free."

Here is a footnote to the story of the Charter Oak; the tree did not have much longer to live in the open air; it fell during a wind storm of August 21, 1856, and was given an appropriate funeral, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes and saluted with music from the Colt Armory band. The refrain of a long epitaph read:

Charter Oak! Charter Oak! tell us a tale,  
Of the years that have fled, like the leaves  
on the gale,  
For thou bearest a brave annal on thy brown  
root and stem,  
And thy heart was a casket for Liberty's gem.  

After the funeral, the tree was cut apart and the wood used
for Charter Oak souvenirs, including picture frames for still more paintings of the tree -- for example, Charter Oak, 1857, by Charles De Wolf Brownell (Figure 43), framed in Charter Oak wood.

Notes

1 Joseph Ropes, a Massachusetts artist who lived in Hartford between 1851 and 1865, painted a series of four city panoramas in 1855 for the Colt family, owners of the Colt Armory in Hartford. These paintings, which now hang in the Wadsworth Atheneum, clearly indicate the central position of the Charter Oak at mid-century. It stood between Main Street and the west bank of the river, in the central financial and residential district.

2 This drawing is also at Olana State Historic Site, file number OL.1977.302. For an illustration, see Elaine Evans Dee, To Embrace the Universe: Drawings of Frederic Edwin Church (exhibition catalogue, Yonkers, New York: Hudson River Museum, 1984), page 21.

3 The 1845 drawing is doubtless the working drawing for Plate 15. It is the understanding of this author that *The Charter Oak at Hartford (listed in Appendix B, No. 1) is similar to Charter Oak (Plate 15) in size and composition.

4 The second painting (Plate 15) now hangs in the Sitting Room at Olana. See F.E. Church, 1966, page 26, for an instance of this confusion.

Plate 16

*Morning*, 1847/1848.

Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches.

Signed and dated lower left: "F. Church -- 1848."

Inscribed on the back: "Painted in 1847 by Frederic E. Church for the American Art-Union."


Provenance: American Art-Union (December 1848); Miss E.C. Heermance, Coxsackie, New York (from December 22, 1848, by lottery, No. 3404); Mrs. Catherine Ganesvoort Lansing, Albany, New York (until c.1910).

Exhibitions: American Art-Union, New York, No. 348 (December 1848); F.E. Church, 1966, No. 4 (March 30-April 30 at Albany only); "Hudson River School: American Landscape Paintings from 1821 to 1907," No. 93, R.W. Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, Louisiana (October 14-November 25, 1973); Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984, No. 7.

Bibliography: *American Art-Union Bulletin* (December 25, 1848), no pagination.


Each date on this painting could be correct. Church may have painted (and signed) *Morning* in 1847 and added the second date when he sold it to the Art-Union in 1848.

*Morning*, like *Rapids of the Susquehanna* (Plate 8), contains a great deep sky. Church will paint scenes of limitless sky and flat low horizon over and over again after his first visit to the island of Mount Desert, Maine, in 1850. In 1847 he has not yet seen an open expanse of water, but he convincingly treats the distant ground plain as water, just as he does in *Moses Viewing the Promised Land* (Plate 5) where the plain can be read as undulating
ocean surface. The heavy foreground rocks in *Morning serve to channel the viewer's path toward the sun, and to separate viewer (and viewing figure in the foreground) from the less earthly forms in the distance.

Church likes to include both sunlit and dark (or stormy) sky, this author believes, in order to create a sense of motion in the light itself, and to catch forms in the act of changing their appearance under the changing light. He does not necessarily include dark and light in his sky to indicate the resolution of sublime experience into the picturesque, as Cole did. The general comments which David Huntington made in the 1966 catalogue on Church still seem to be sound, although they have been repeated frequently and thoughtlessly:

[Church] was born with the right talents, at the right time, at the right place. He supplied the paramount artistic need of his day, the realistic re-creation and spiritual interpretation of nature. Thomas Cole . . . set him on the proper road, but Church replaced the subjectivity of the romantic Cole with the objectivity of a Thoreau. Church's nature lived regardless of personal fancy (F.E. Church, 1966, page 20).

The viewer may wonder why Church includes a "mackerel sky" in this painting. Rows of fleecy alto-cumulus clouds usually indicate unsettled, stormy, but milder weather when they appear in the morning over New England. Is Church attempting to express the dawn of an unsettled but beautiful day (for America, perhaps), or simply the most memorable dawn he has yet seen? He may be doing both.
Plate 17

Harp of the Winds, c.1847/1849.
Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 inches.
Unsigned.


Additional illustration: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Bulletin 49 (October 1951), page 59.

This painting is one of the rare early works by Church which portrays a storm, and certainly relates to such lost works as *The Plague of Darkness, c.1848/1849, and *The Deluge, c.1850/1851.* The date, title, and subject of Harp of the Winds are open to question. According to the Karolik catalogue, its present title is traditional, attached to the painting by someone other than the artist. Between 1847 and 1849 Church painted a number of small finished works which went to the Art-Union or National Academy. This painting could be any number of them, but most likely it is *A Passing Storm, described in the December 1849 Bulletin as "14 x 12 inches. A bold rock rises in the right foreground. Heavy black clouds are in the sky and a shower is falling in the distance."*

The present title seems to come from the literature of German and English Romanticism. This movement advocated the superiority of natural music made by wind or rain to that produced by man. "Harp of the Winds" may allude to the music of falling rain, but a more usual interpretation
of nature's harp is a row of trees, as represented in Homer Martin's *Harp of the Winds: A View of the Seine*, 1895 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The Romantic movement also popularized man-made wind harps, or Aeolian harps, that were named after the Greek god of wind. These were large stringed instruments designed to vibrate in the wind like David's harp. According to legend, King David hung a lyre over his bed at night to catch the wind. The rock in the foreground of Church's painting does have a trapezoidal or lyre shape; perhaps it is Church's representation of a Catskill landmark known by that name. The author does not know if such a landmark exists, however. Neither Cole nor Church ever refer to a site by this name.

See Figure 49 for a detail from Cole's *Manfred*, 1833, one of the most powerful renderings of the rock. Church's earliest works to include the lyre-shaped rock are copies of Cole's work (like *Niagara Falls*, Plate 4). He will continue to use this image to allude to supernatural events. The rock appears in the foreground of *Blasted Tree*, 1849 (Plate 21), thought to be a memorial to Cole. It is also part of the foreground in *Twilight, Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and Night*, 1850 (Plate 24).

The author feels that *Harp of the Winds* is an assemblage of forms made from on-site sketches, itself a preparatory sketch for *The Plague of Darkness*, c.1848/1849. The bulky clouds and slab of rain-filled sky in *Harp of the Winds* certainly satisfy the sense of storm needed for *The Plague of Darkness*: "darkness which may be felt."

The lighting on the rock and its commanding position are ideal for the figure of Moses, who must be shown acting as a god, controlling sky and land and directing the viewer's visual path into the distance.

Church may also have referred to this painting when he made *The Deluge* in 1850/1851. The etched treatment of rain here provides a clue to the "metallic and unpleasant
tone of color" which was a criticism of *The Deluge. This sense of metallic sharp rain is attractive in Harp of the Winds, where the screens of water, moving diagonally in parallel planes, make effective contrast to the rough-chiseled, harshly-lit foreground and the expanding, billowing, translucent clouds.

Notes

1 See Appendix C, No.'s 11 and 23.
3 This suggestion is made in the Karolik catalogue, page 160.
4 See Appendix C, No. 11.
5 See Appendix C, No. 23.
Plate 18

*View near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1847.

Oil on canvas, 27 x 40 inches.

Signed and dated lower center: "F. Church 1847."

Owner: Private Collection, Michigan.


Exhibitions: "Annual Exhibition," No. 290, National Academy of Design, New York (Spring 1848); Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984, No. 5.


A painting of central importance to Church's development is *View near Stockbridge, Massachusetts*. He painted the work in the fall of 1847, based on sketches made that summer in the Berkshire Hills. The following spring he placed it in exhibition at the National Academy and sold it to Cyrus Field. View near Stockbridge did not appear at the Art-Union, however, and received little critical attention.

The painting leads the viewer from foreground to distant sun along a carefully designed path of water. The cow in the foreground serves to initiate this movement; it is also the viewer's surrogate, an animal substitute for the human observer. Church sketched various views of the Berkshire countryside around Stockbridge, but none show the view illustrated in this painting. It is clearly an arrangement composed to resemble nature at a special moment.

One of his drawings contains an interesting comment (Figure 50, Stockbridge, August 1847): "Much of the detail in the distance which I have portrayed cannot be distinguished at sunset -- . . . it would be well to represent
a storm clearing off and bright streamlets of water running down the rocky foreground to the meadows --." His reasons for including cloudy and clear sky in the same setting are now highly suggestive. The artist can combine the clarity of a bright day with the long shadows of evening in such a setting. Sunlight streaming between clouds can be made to illuminate forms at will; patches of sunlit ground can alternate with strips of shadow. The overall effect is variety and surprise, a juxtaposing of light and dark patterns which enliven the ground plane and produce effective recession into depth. In addition, the clouds and clearing sky have contrasting textures which can enhance atmospheric depth. In View near Stockbridge, as in Rapids of the Susquehanna (Plate 8), the sky seems to be a series of transparent membranes parallel to the picture plane. The membrane nearest to the viewer contains rich, dissolving, cotton-candy clouds. Succeeding membranes are increasingly light-filled and motionless. The layer of clouds near the sun, in fact, seems too fine-textured, unearthly, and radiant to relate to the foreground scene. The passage from cow to sun becomes a trip into suspended time as well as motionless space.

Church demonstrates a mature understanding of Claude's approach to landscape in View near Stockbridge: landscape which guides the viewer on a winding path through vegetation (appealing to the sense of touch as well as vision), and landscape which necessarily releases its sensual control over the viewer at the principal focus, the bright sun, where limitations of time and space are dropped.

The artist would not visit Europe, or see a sizable collection of paintings by Claude, for another twenty years. He surely acquired his knowledge through Cole and the Art-Union. One painting by Cole which Church may have known is The Departure, 1837 (Figure 51), a piece strongly indebted to Claude's manner of composition. Church's
young acquaintances at the Art-Union (Regis Gignoux, for example) were already working with translucent "luminist" skies. This style can be attributed directly to Asher Durand, guiding spirit of the Art-Union and newly-elected president of the National Academy. An outstanding landscape by Durand which illustrates his atmospheric luminism in this period and his own understanding of Claude is Landscape -- Scene from "Thanatosia", 1850 (Figure 52). Another landscape which was widely praised is Durand's Solitary Oak, 1844 (Figure 53): "Without any effort at warmth of color, it has that glow of sunlight which is so difficult to express."²

American landscape artists at mid-century had no clear-cut theory; they were indebted to Claude but failed to acknowledge his influence on the composition of their works. Durand claimed that he admired Claude's portrayal of the sun, which revealed a close study of reality, but he did not admire Claude's "forced compositions," which were based on the laws of art rather than the truth of nature.³ In truth, "despite their protests to the contrary, members of the Hudson River School had recourse to a number of landscape conventions which were philosophically contradictory, and only rarely did they entirely abandon the rules of composition for a direct confrontation with nature."⁴

Notes

1. This was the first Church painting to be purchased by Field. He would also purchase

*West Rock, New Haven, 1849 (Plate 23)
Lower Falls, Rochester, 1849 (Appendix B, No. 4)
*The Natural Bridge, Virginia, 1852 (Plate 35)
*Falls of the Tequendama near Bogotá, New Granada, 1854
*Cotopaxi, 1855 (Figure 54).

2 Knickerbocker 23 (June 6, 1844), page 596.
4 Andrus, page 262.
Plate 19

*To the Memory of Cole, 1848.

Oil on canvas, approximately 28 x 40 inches.

Signed and dated on rock, lower right: "F. Church/April 1848."

Owner: Des Moines Women's Club, Des Moines, Iowa.

Provenance: G.W. Austen (from April/May 1848); sold at auction as Tribute to Cole, New York (March 1859); rediscovered by J. Gray Sweeney in its present location (c.1979).

Exhibition: American Art-Union, New York, No. 251 (May-September 1848).

Bibliography: American Art-Union Bulletins (May-September 1848); Crayon 8 (April 1859), page 126; Warner, 1900; Gerald L. Carr, "Beyond the Tip: Some Addenda to Frederic Church's 'The Icebergs,'" Arts 56 (November 1981), pages 108 and 111; J. Gray Sweeney, personal interview (July 12, 1985).

Thomas Cole painted a work for G.W. Austen entitled The Cross in the Wilderness (present whereabouts unknown) in early 1846, while he was planning his "Cross and the World" series. Soon after Cole's death, Austen commissioned what may have been a pendant to this work from Church in February 1848. Church completed the work, *To the Memory of Cole, in April; and the following summer, this painting and The Cross in the Wilderness were displayed together in an Art-Union memorial exhibition.

*To the Memory of Cole combines the river in View near Stockbridge (Plate 18) with a foreground brook. Cole's lost painting may have included something similar. One of his proposed subjects (Number 119 in the 1827 list) was "The meeting of the waters. The confluence of two rivers, one a rapid & broken stream the other placid & flowing gently -- in the foreground two lovers -- sitting on a flowery bank --."¹ There was also an unfinished work entitled Meeting of the Waters in Cole's studio at
the time of his death. It may have reinforced Church's idea for using two rivers, but otherwise bears no relation to *To the Memory of Cole.*²

Church painted the work in obvious haste. The richly detailed foreground, which contains a tree stump, rushing brook, cross, and white and red flowers, is treated in the more broad, thick-edged manner which Cole used. This is perhaps Church's most Cole-like painting in its technique. The composition leads the viewer among obvious symbols; he can move along the foreground from tree stump to spotlit cross to clump of Cole-like trees (which combine evergreen and deciduous varieties).³ The viewer can also move from sunlit foreground along the gentle curving river into what appear to be shadowed wintry mountains and clouds.⁴ Both movements -- across the foreground and from foreground into distance -- are somewhat disturbing and may indicate that the composition was planned, as well as executed, in haste. It is unsatisfactory to move from the light into relative dimness, to start from the foreground cross and go anywhere else in the composition. The result is a powerful focus on the cross, of course, but an unnatural sense of motion from distant elements back into the spotlit foreground. The cross is trapped in effect in its little pool of light.

This may be Church's first attempt to indicate the passage of time by combining several seasons in the same view. A more successful treatment of the seasons, in this author's opinion, is his *Cotopaxi*, 1855 (Figure 54). Here the viewer progresses from a sunlit spring foreground into "wintry" distance, but the distant volcano and sky are clear and light-filled, and pull the viewer toward them. The highly acclaimed *Cotopaxi*, 1862 (Figure 55), will be a further treatment of multiple seasons and phenomena in one view; here too Church is careful to provide paths for the
viewer toward the distant light.

Notes


2 *Meeting of the Waters*, currently in a private collection, is considerably larger than the Church painting: 48 x 74 inches. Its subject appears to be the joining of two large bodies of water, perhaps two parts of the Red Sea. See *Exhibition of Paintings by Thomas Cole N.A. from the Artist's Studio, Catskill, New York* (exhibition catalogue, New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1964), page 3, for more information.

3 According to J. Gray Sweeney, these trees symbolize salvation, in contrast to the tree stump and sunlit cross (which symbolize death and resurrection). The two evergreens in silhouette could be Christ and the repentant thief on the cross; a deciduous tree could be the unrepentant thief. There are more than three trees in the group, however.

4 Plate 19 is a defective reproduction. These pale clouds are actually deep rose and mauve in the painting. For comparable clouds, see *Rutland Falls, Vermont* (Plate 20).
Plate 20

*Rutland Falls, Vermont, 1848.
Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches.
Signed and dated lower left: "F. Church/1848."
Owner: The White House Collection, Washington, D.C.
Provenance: American Art-Union (December 1848); C.W. Sandford, New York (from December 22, 1848, by lottery, No. 4425); rediscovered in New York State (early 1970's); Cynthia Fehr Antiques, Washington, D.C., and New Market, Maryland (1975).
Exhibitions: American Art-Union, New York, No. 360 (December 1848); University Hospital Antiques Show, Philadelphia (April 15-19, 1975).
Bibliography: American Art-Union Bulletin (December 25, 1848), no pagination; Warner, 1900; Anne Dettre (Office of the Curator, The White House), letter to the author (June 12, 1985).
Illustration: Antiques 107 (April 1975), page 583 (Cynthia Fehr color advertisement).

*Rutland Falls, Vermont was painted in late 1848, in time to be sold to the Art-Union for its December distribution. This work repeats the cloud formations which Church used earlier that year in *To the Memory of Cole. The later painting, which may also be a tribute to Cole, is much more cohesive and powerful. Church increases the mass and volume in the clouds, and matches their presence to a comparable, carefully planned landscape. The eye very readily follows an oval path from the rushing water and foreground pool to the edge of the lumber mill and out through a horizontal stretch of waterfall. Like Van Vechten House (Plate 13), Rutland Falls elevates the building to make the viewer look up into it.

Church treats the clouds, water, and rocks as variants of the same tactile, volumetric substance. These massive forms are pleasingly integrated with thinner elements: sky, pine trees, and mill. The oval path below the horizon,
explosive billowing clouds, and vibrant colors combine to entrance the viewer and pull him continuously around in the scene.

*Rutland Falls, Vermont* seems to the author to capture the sense of power and motion that is present in one of Cole's studies for his first set of "Voyage of Life" paintings: a study for Manhood, c.1839 (Figure 56). Here the oval patterns formed in the torrents of water repeat the power and motion of the sky. The element missing in Church's painting, the voyager, is perhaps approximated in the side of the lumber mill which looks like a human face.

The present location of *Rutland Falls, Vermont*, above a high doorway in the corner of the State Dining Room in The White House, is entirely insufficient for the viewer to appreciate this small but powerful painting. On its gilded frame is the label "Schoharie Creek." Schoharie Creek, a site in the Adirondacks about thirty miles west of Albany, was painted several times by Thomas Cole, who called it "Skoarry Creek." The author is not aware of any extant paintings by Cole of this subject. Church possibly sketched Schoharie Creek in the fall of 1848, during a trip to the Adirondacks. One of the drawings from this trip is Water and Rocks, September 1848 (Figure 57). The collection of his early drawings at Olana contains numerous sketches of waterfalls, which gave him ample material to choose from. Another drawing which he may have consulted is Mountain Scene, November 1845 (Figure 58), of an unknown site.

When *Rutland Falls, Vermont* was rediscovered, it had the title Schoharie Creek, Adirondack, New York. The White House curatorial staff determined that the site pictured is actually Gookin Falls, near Rutland. This, too, was a site frequently visited by Hudson River painters. Durand painted several views of Rutland, although not the
falls, in 1837-1840. The whole problem of identifying a Church painting according to the site is created by his notorious habit of combining sketches from different sites into one painting. It is probable that *Rutland Falls, Vermont is the correct title of this work, the same Rutland Falls exhibited in December 1848 at the Art-Union; but Church may have developed the composition from Schoharie Creek and other sites.
Plate 21

**Blasted Tree, 1849.**

Oil on canvas, 29 7/8 x 24 7/8 inches.

Signed and dated on horizontal tree trunk, lower center: "F. Church 1849."


Provenance: Eldridge Gerry Merrick, Danbury, Connecticut (from 1849); E.G. Merrick II; Mrs. John P. Nevins (his daughter), West Brattleboro, Vermont; Adams Davidson & Co., Washington, D.C. (until 1969).

Exhibition: Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984, No. 8.


*Blasted Tree* may be the work entitled *A Mountain Tempest*, exhibited at the National Academy of Design in the spring of 1849. It is not known when it acquired its present title, or if the first owner (E.G. Merrick) commissioned it. *Blasted Tree* and *Above the Clouds at Sunrise, 1849* (Plate 22), employ the vibrant rose colors found in the earlier *To the Memory of Cole* and *Rutland Falls, Vermont*. All four paintings are probably tributes to Cole. The slightly earlier landscapes are "busy" scenes, filled with Cole motifs and technique. *Blasted Tree* and *Above the Clouds at Sunrise* select one motif associated with Cole, enlarge it, and treat it as a monument.

The tree destroyed by lightning was one of the most important symbols in Cole's oeuvre. He usually placed it in the foreground to punctuate a tranquil setting with evidence of violent sudden death, or to idealize the scene by acting as the ancient time-worn "spectator." In *Blasted*
Tree, Church places the shattered tree within a finely detailed foreground, against rose and blue clouds of a misty unsubstantial substance. He creates dramatic contrast between tactile reality — the specific evidence of cruel destruction — and the larger realities of thought and memory which the misty distance evokes. Secondary Cole motifs such as the mountain top with pine trees and the rock used in Harp of the Winds are included with care; they do not compete with the central tree.

Church could have adapted his tree from any number of Cole's images. Two memorable examples are the right foreground tree in Portage Falls on the Genesee, c.1840 (Figure 59), and the left foreground tree in Schrcon Mountain, Adirondacks, 1838 (Figure 60). Church's working drawing is probably his Study for Trees, July 1845 (Figure 61). The finished tree and foreground are treated with the clear incised highlighting that Church first used in Christian on the Borders . . . (Plate 11). The structure of the tree has the sense of a living form which responds to its own strength and to gravity. The lower, thick, slightly tilted trunk, the highlighted fractured pieces at the point of stress, and a steeply angled upper section create the convincing picture of a brittle dead tree which still retains the weighted contrapuntal position of its former living self. Jasper Cropsey would paint a similar blasted tree in 1851 (Storm in the Wilderness, Cleveland Museum of Art), but his painting dramatizes the ripped and shredded form at the expense of its semblance to a once-living tree.

If Blasted Tree is indeed the work entitled *A Mountain Tempest, it was exhibited in the same National Academy exhibition as the most famous tribute to Cole, Durand's Kindred Spirits, 1849 (Figure 62). This work also contains a blasted tree (in the center foreground). Church probably felt no real sense of rivalry with Durand, who was already being called Cole's successor. Church deeply admired both
artists. About Cole, however, he was explicit; he never rose to the level of his teacher, in his own estimation, as long as he lived.²

Notes

1 Appendix C, No. 10.
2 Warner, 1900.
Plate 22

*Above the Clouds at Sunrise, 1849.

Oil on canvas, 27 1/4 x 40 1/4 inches.

Signed and dated on stone, lower right of center: "F.E. Church/1849."


Please review the comments appropriate to this work within the discussion of Blasted Tree (Plate 21). For *Above the Clouds at Sunrise, Church selects the oval ring of clouds which was a favorite motif of his teacher -- see Studies for "The Voyage of Life: Manhood" (Figures 30 and 56) and Course of Empire: The Savage State (Figure 31). He enlarges this ring to frame a sunrise, and centers the sun vertically (just to left of center horizontally) in the composition.

As in Rapids of the Susquehanna (Plate 8) and View near Stockbridge (Plate 18), Church indicates convincing depth in the sky by contrasting the movement and texture of elements near the viewer with more distant elements.
The plane near the viewer in this picture contains coarse, ephemeral, fast-moving clouds which appear to expand the scene as they dissolve and pull away from the sun, stretching the horizon line out. The clouds and sky closer to the sun are more fine-textured and quiet. This smooth area of brilliant light makes wonderful contrast to the sharp dark foreground trees which appear to point or reach toward the light. The trees which are just to the left of the sun and which almost overlap it lead the viewer's eye on a radial path from foreground to sun, a movement which would be thwarted if these trees were placed precisely over the sun. The dissolving foreground mist contains fingers which point toward the sun even as they melt. The viewer feels that he can follow any one of an infinite number of radii from foreground into the bright focus.

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of this composition on Church's later work. He begins to visit the open expanses of water, rocks, and beach at Mount Desert Island, Maine, in the 1850's. His later North American landscapes are sometimes dated by their treatment of space; a wide horizon and sense of limitless space usually means the work is "post 1850." Church, however, had not visited Mount Desert when he painted *Above the Clouds at Sunrise*. His experience in painting this work and his pleasure in treating a powerful focus and sense of unlimited space prefigured his approach to the Mount Desert views.
Plate 23

*West Rock, New Haven, New Haven Scenery, or Having near New Haven, 1849.*

Oil on canvas, 26 1/2 x 40 inches.

Signed and dated 1849.


Provenance: Cyrus W. Field (from 1849); Robert G. Vose Galleries, Boston (until 1950).


In 1848 Church won an Associate Membership in the National Academy of Design in recognition of his two entries that year: *View near Stockbridge, Massachusetts* (Plate 18) and *The River of the Water of Life* (present
whereabouts unknown). The latter painting was praised for "the truth with which a partial rippling of the stream is represented, and the great accuracy of touch in the foliage." In 1849 at the age of twenty-three, Church became a full member of the National Academy, the second youngest Academician in its history. The painting which brought him this honor was "West Rock, New Haven." It, too, was praised for its convincing recreation of nature. The April 1849 Bulletin said:

The sky and water in this piece are truly admirable. Seldom have we seen painted water which fulfills so well as this the "Oxford Graduate's" conditions of excellence. Church has taken his place, at a single leap, among the great masters of landscape.

Ruskin, the "Oxford Graduate," attempted "to demonstrate the utter falseness both of the facts and principles [of ideal composition]." Volume One of Ruskin's Modern Painters, an obtrusive work, was available in America in 1848. It contained comments like: "The distinctiveness, not the universality of truth renders it important." Lisa Fellows Andrus summarizes the equivocal abstractions in Modern Painters as neatly as possible:

[Ruskin] stated that it was the unimaginative artist who had to rely on laws of composition to put forms together, while the imaginative artist needed only the laws of nature and his own mental vision. By a process of instantaneous selection that was more dreaming than thinking the true artist arranged his memories on the canvas in a kind of composite dream-image... unimaginative artists included Claude and Varley. The imaginative painter par excellence was Turner.

Ruskin was enormously popular in America in 1849, more popular here than in England, because he seemed to
support the current American vogue of nature worship.

William Stillman came across Volume One of Modern Painters in Church's studio in 1849 and said:

Like many others, wise and otherwise,
I received from it 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. 8

Church does not confuse nature and art, in spite of the critical praise and his own acquaintance with Ruskin's words. He composes *West Rock, New Haven thoughtfully, starting with sketches of the site and ending with a composition that exists for itself and that engrosses the viewer with patterns of light and dark, curves and textures -- a composition that provides an ideal setting for a well-known story.

Compare a drawing for West Rock (Figure 63) with the finished painting. Church lowers the horizon in the painting and includes clouds which multiply the cap-like shape of "West Rock" in the sky. The shadows from these clouds further enliven the scene; their patterns enhance the deep curve of the river, giving the viewer an exciting sweeping trip into the landscape toward an opening on the left horizon. West Rock itself is walled by dark trees (perhaps a reference to its special history). The viewer's path reaches the horizon (and West Rock) on the left side of the composition; the bulk of the light/dark patterns and clouds are on the right side. Here, as in Catskill Creek (Plate 2), Church expertly contrasts the glass-smooth water with feathery, tactile vegetation and light-filled sky. All these contrasts and counterbalances add a sense of depth and potential movement to what could be a static view of the mushroom-cap hill.

In 1852 *West Rock, New Haven was engraved by S.V.
Hunt for *Home Book of the Picturesque* (Figure 64). The engraving faithfully reproduces the light/dark patterns in Church's work (Figure 64 gives a better sense of the painting, in fact, than the reproduction used for Plate 23, which is too dark). The accompanying story in *Home Book of the Picturesque* relates another patriotic legend in Connecticut history. Two English supporters of Oliver Cromwell -- Edward Whalley and William Goffe -- had escaped to America after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. For the first few months they lived safely in Massachusetts. Then a notice of general pardon arrived from the king, and these two were specifically excluded from it. For the rest of their lives, they lived as fugitives in Connecticut, sometimes in towns, other times in the wilderness. Most of these years they hid in a cave on the summit of West Rock, where sympathetic New Haven residents brought them food. Mary Field records that the "Regicides" carved their epitaph above the entrance to this cave: "Opposition to tyrants is obedience to God."\(^9\)

Church's *West Rock* is the pleasant site of rural activities, a painful view for the hunted men in the story, who could see such a scene and not take part in it. Church paints the landscape to enhance the legend of the Regicides. Without exception, his paintings which relate to patriotic legends are set in radiant daylight and open countryside. Nature in a sense does tell the story, but it is Church's thoughtfully constructed version of nature, a composition which turns an ordinary site into an ideal one.

Notes

1 See Appendix C, No. 8.
2 *Knickerbocker* 33 (November 1848), page 444, quoted

3 Thomas Cummings (1804-1894) was made an Academician at the age of twenty-two.

4 There have been alternate titles for this work since its first exhibition: New Haven Scenery according to the May 1849 Bulletin, and Having near New Haven by several modern scholars, including Stebbins.


6 Modern Painters 1, page 138.


9 Mary E. Field in Home Book of the Picturesque, page 141.
Plate 24

*Twilight, "Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and Night", 1850.

Oil on canvas, 32 x 48 inches.

Signed and dated lower left: "F.E. Church/-50."


Additional illustrations: American Light, 1980, page 10 (color) and page 168.

The December 1850 Bulletin included the following description of this work:
a secure environment in which both sun and its reflection, the little "face" of the house, can nestle. The river which undulates through the right foreground continues in the left foreground (where it is barely visible), cut off by the bottom border. Thus the viewer is carried into the center of the left foreground hill, toward the little glowing house. What might have been the focus, the sun, is effectively cut off by hills and protruding rock, so that the viewer follows reflections and afterglows through the composition, not a path into clear light. The focused house speaks for the entire work in inviting contemplation and reflection on the part of the viewer. The ground plane is passive, dependent on the actions of the heavens.

Church was now a recognized "sky painter." An assessment of his style appeared in the May 1850 Bulletin, the first and most complete analysis to be made during Church's early period:

... the three landscapes by Church, who seizes upon some occasional and impressive effect of clouds, or some transitory phenomenon of light, and painting it with almost crude reality, and a careful attention to atmospheric truths, transports us to the scene at once. No. 349 -- Twilight ["Short Arbit- er..."] is an instance of this. We seem to breathe the air of this landscape while we look at it, and to feel the cool breeze, which wreathes the smoke in eddying volumes about the chimney, blowing also upon us.

Church has thus far painted distinct and particular aspects of Nature, so that scarcely any two of his works resemble each other, excepting, perhaps, in the emphasis with which he has wrought out his clouds and skies -- the earth, with him, being painted generally with reference to the sky, which is the reverse of the ordinary practice of artists. Hitherto, also, he has been ringing the changes of atmospheric effects, which he has expressed with a sort of harsh truthfulness. At some future day, perhaps, he will relent into softer conceptions, and call up gentler scenes with that
wand of his, which, although in hands so youthful, seems already endowed with some of Prospero's magic...

Six years later Church painted a similar composition for his friend, the sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer: Sunset (Figure 65). This work is one fourth the size of Twilight, "Short Arbiter . . ." and has small but important differences. It includes a more focused visible sunset, the ground is less undulating, the rock formation is gone, and a creek in the foreground separates viewer from middle-ground. These differences mean that the viewer does not experience the twilight here as in *Twilight, "Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and Night", where the nightfall is heavy, sinking, voluptuous, and encompassing.
Plate 25
*Landscape, Catskill Twilight, or Twilight, New Haven, c.1850.

Oil on canvas, 11 x 16 inches.

Unsigned.


Provenance: American Art-Union (August-December 20, 1850); H. D. Clary, Boston (December 20, 1850, by lottery, No. 3432); Adams Davidson Galleries, New York (c.1980).


Bibliography: American Art-Union Bulletin (December 1850), page 172.

Illustrations: Antiques 117 (April 1980), page 760 (Adams Davidson color advertisement); Antiques 125 (April 1984), page 765 (Alexander color advertisement).

Two recent titles for this work derive from art dealers: Catskill Twilight (from Alexander Gallery) and Twilight, New Haven (from Adams Davidson). The work is probably *Landscape, which Church sold to the Art-Union in 1850. The December 1850 Bulletin described it as "11 x 16 inches. A cottage beside a road, broadly lighted by the setting sun. Beyond are hills in shadow."

Church treats the house and sky thoughtfully. The large glowing house resembles a massive boat on a barren evening sea. Nonetheless, this is a disquieting work. The ground plane undulates like an ocean surface without leading the viewer anywhere. The footpath by the house and the central road stop in the middle distance, as though their malleable, dough-like forms were pinched off at that point. Like van Gogh's Wheatfield with Crows, 1890, the landscape does not invite the viewer to enter it. The two parts of the road in the foreground appear to conclude the viewer's path through the environment, rather than to
initiates it. The tiny figure in the foreground adds to the confusion. In order to be comprehensible on the scale of the other forms, the figure would have to be in the middle distance. Perhaps Church was experimenting here, reversing foreground and distant forms. The Art-Union may have bought his painting before it was finished.

*Landscape* is one of the last small works which Church sold to the Art-Union. After the splendid reception of *West Rock, New Haven* (Plate 23) and *Twilight, "Short Arbiter 'twixt Day and Night*" (Plate 24), Church received enough commissions to fully occupy his time. These works, like Cole's commissioned works, were larger canvases than those he painted to offer for sale.

Daniel Wadsworth died six months after Cole, in July 1848 (the fourth anniversary of the opening of his Athenæum). Church's new patrons would be young entrepreneurs and industrialists like Cyrus Field and Marshall Owen Roberts, who preferred topographical landscapes to history painting or romance -- in keeping with America's mid-century preoccupation with nature worship.
New England Landscape, c.1850/1851.
Oil on canvas, 25 1/8 x 36 1/4 inches.
Signed lower left: "F. Church."
Exhibition: Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984, No. 9.

New England Landscape, of uncertain date and provenance, is nevertheless a splendid example of Church's cumulative painting experience at mid-century. It belongs to a type which is now familiar in Church's repertoire: a pastoral, ideal setting which resembles "real" scenery under special conditions. Church combines glassy water and clean, richly detailed vegetation as he does in Catskill Creek (Plate 2). He repeats the sense of clouds lifting above a vast, rolling, water-filled plain in Moses Viewing the Promised Land (Plate 5); the clouds are edged with iridescent curling rims in both works, giving a sense of recession into light-filled depth. As in Catskill Sunset (Plate 10), he visually lowers the horizon with a centered pool of water and concave arrangement of hills. Most
notably, Church experiments further here with the special light/shadow treatment of *View near Stockbridge* (Plate 18) and *West Rock, New Haven* (Plate 23). In *New England Landscape*, the viewer's path from foreground to distance follows closely-spaced zig zag patterns of sunlight and shade, which provide effective recession into depth.

This work recreates the sense of quiet abundance and peace found in *West Rock*. Such a setting appealed to the practical and morally-minded American public to whom it was tangible evidence of God's presence on earth. Durand's *View on Esopus Creek, Ulster County, New York* (Figure 66) appeared in both the National Academy and Art-Union exhibitions of 1850. It may have influenced the general composition of *New England Landscape* and the sky in *New England Scenery* (Plate 27). Church consistently uses a more elevated viewpoint than Durand, however.

In 1850 Church and Durand were detailing and highlighting the vegetation in a very similar style -- that of *Christian on the Borders of the "Valley of the Shadow of Death"* (Plate 11). This incised highlighting is the result, in Durand's case, of his experience as an engraver, compounded with Cole's influence. Although Church includes atmospheric depth within the ground plane (making his distant hills increasingly pale), he extends the sharply detailed portion of his landscape further into the distance than do either Durand or Cole. This gives Church's landscapes a lively clear surface and convinces the viewer that his own perceptions of reality are heightened.

When the Amon Carter Museum acquired *New England Landscape*, it was entitled *Evening after a Storm* and thought to be a work which Church sold to the American Art-Union in 1849. This assessment (by Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc.) is now considered erroneous. Although the museum lists "Evening after a Storm" as an alternate title for the work, it accepts only the provenance known to accompany
New England Landscape.

The description for *Evening after a Storm in the July 1849 Bulletin could apply to New England Landscape and View near Stockbridge: "A dense cloud is rising, like a curtain, and from below, the setting sun is darting its beams over a tranquil summer scene, throwing the long shadows forward of intervening objects." One critic ("G.W.P.") objected that *Evening after a Storm was

a beautiful and peculiar sunset, whose ruddy rays fringe the tops of distant hills and forests, while we are left standing in a neglected [foreground] garden, overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish .... It is just after a shower, and the sun is setting; such a garden is just the sort of place .... [we] desire to be out of; everything about us is dripping, spidery, unwholesome .... For these reasons we would have preferred to have had the grassy lawn at the center of this picture continued into the shadow of the foreground ...."

This reviewer makes no mention of the pond in New England Landscape or the arrangements for a picnic in its lower left foreground. New England Landscape, View near Stockbridge, and *Evening after a Storm may all derive from sketches which Church made in the Berkshire Hills. One of these drawings (Figure 50) was mentioned in the discussion of View near Stockbridge. Church notes on the drawing: "It would be well to represent a storm clearing off -- and bright streamlets of water running down the rocky foreground to the meadows --" and "Very weedy foreground." This may indeed be the view which Church transcribed into *Evening after a Storm, a view related to New England Landscape in its treatment of cloud forms and light.
Notes

1 Plate 26 does not reproduce the vibrant color in the clouds, which vary between deep rose and pale silver-pink.


3 See Appendix C, No. 13.

4 Art-Union Bulletin (December 1849), page 16.
Plate 27

*New England Scenery, 1851.

Oil on canvas, 36 x 53 inches.

Signed and dated lower right: "F. Church '51."


Provenance: American Art-Union (October 1851–December 17, 1852, for $500.); G. Daniels (at Art-Union disbandment sale, December 17, 1852, for $1300.); Robert M. Olyphant (until December 18-19, 1877); Somerville Gallery, New York (from December 18-19, 1877, for $1425.); David Dow (until 1916).


The Art-Union Bulletin of October 1851 called *New England Scenery "a work full of the most glowing light."

A year later the Bulletin added: "This picture is considered by many to be the chef-d'oeuvre of the artist. . . ."
The sky and clouds are remarkably fine. It contains
great breadth of effect, with a wonderful excellence in
details."

This work, like the preceding landscape (Plate 26),
is a masterpiece of Church's youth, an example of his
cumulative painting experience at mid-century. Like
Hooker and Company (Plate 9), *New England Scenery in-
cludes small processional figures which lead the viewer's
eye through a crystalline setting. Foreground and middle-
ground trees recall Cole's anthropomorphic forms. The
mill and rushing water repeat a motif which Cole often
used (in Schoon Lake, Figure 67, for example).

As in New England Landscape, this painting combines
a sense of depth with lively, sharp detail extended well
into the distant forms. *New England Scenery, in partic-
ular, reflects the influence of Church's first visit to
the open space of Mount Desert Island. He creates "breadth
of effect" here, not by cutting off the forms which frame
the painting on each side, but by adding more snap to the
oval forms within the picture. The curved border of the
lake, for instance, is punctuated by the white waterfall
at one point and by cows at another. The direction of
the cows' movement is reversed in the horizontal foreground
procession. Note that the bridge is blocked on each end
(for the viewer) by heavy vegetation, encouraging the view-
er to travel up through the path of reflections, waterfall,
and clouds into the open sky.

The intended effect, a boundless sky above its per-
fet reflection in the landscape, is today marred by the
apparent disintegration of the green or yellow pigment.
In 1966, during the first major retrospective exhibition
(F.B. Church, 1966), *New England Scenery had a prominent
place. One reviewer called it "a stage-set arrangement of
hills, water and small figures . . . flooded with an un-
persuasive pink light which looks out of place with the
blue sky."\(^1\) The pink light, this author feels, was not Church's intention. *New England Scenery*, as Church painted it, must have provided the sense of unity in ground and sky to be found in *Home by the Lake* (Plate 33).

When the Art-Union was forced to disband at the end of 1852, *New England Scenery* sold for thirteen hundred dollars, "probably the highest price that had ever been paid for an American landscape."\(^2\) "Church, surprised in his studio by news of what his work had brought, said it was too much; the picture wasn't worth it.... But he presently grew into an ample estimate of the value of his work."\(^3\)

Notes

1 Elisabeth Stevens, "Observant Melodramatist," Arts 40 (April 1966), page 44.
3 Huntington, 1960, pages 37-38, quoting T.C.E., "Church, the Artist," Brooklyn Eagle (April 15, 1900), page 28.
Plate 29

*Beacon, off Mount Desert Island or Beacon off Mount Desert, 1851.*

Oil on canvas, 31 x 46 inches.

Signed and dated lower right: "F Church/-51."

Owner: Private Collection, Texas.


Exhibitions: "Annual Exhibition," No. 371, National Academy of Design, New York (Spring 1851); American Art-Union, New York, No. 266 (1851) and No. 350 (1852); F.E. Church, 1966, No. 22; "Romantic Vision in America," No. 20, Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas (October 9-November 28, 1971); American Light, 1980, No. 88; Early Landscapes of F.E. Church, 1984, No. 13.


The Art-Union Bulletin of August 1850 reported:

Church, Gignoux and Hubbard have gone to the coast of Maine, where, it is said, that the marine views are among the finest in the country. None of these artists, we believe, have hitherto attempted such
subjects . . . . The exhibition of the magnificent Achenbach last year in the Art-Union Gallery, seems to have directed the attention of our younger men to the grandeur of Coast scenery.

Andreas Achenbach (1815-1910) painted numerous views of the Sicilian coast in a style reminiscent of John Martin (see a detail from Sunset off a Stormy Coast of Sicily, 1853, Figure 68). Church would not adopt this style. "One of the first things that Church learned from Cole was that there is no special way for an artist to paint. He must find out the manner for himself . . . and choose such implements . . . [etc.] as might best be suited to the expression of his own individuality."²

Church saw a painting at the Art-Union in 1849 by Jasper Cropsey, who had just returned from Europe: Isle of Capri, 1848 (Figure 69). Cropsey, like Church, was deeply influenced by Cole in his youth. His early style, in fact, is very much like Cole's, particularly the thick application of paint on the highlighted forms. Cropsey pays scant attention to atmospheric depth; the viewer is conscious of the paint in Cropsey's forms, whether distant or foreground. Church was perhaps more influenced by Isle of Capri, painted in a style close to his own, than by Achenbach's works.

Cole had visited Mount Desert Island off the coast of Maine at least once, in August 1844. Church would spend seven summers at Mount Desert during the next decade, beginning with his first trip in 1850. He is credited with naming one of the lakes ("Eagle Lake") and with making the island famous.³ There was splendid scenery, of course, and good hunting and fishing. No other artist known to the author would visit Mount Desert so often. The Mount Desert experience was Church's first taste (in fact as well as spirit) of a foreign environment. He was beyond the mainland and
outside Puritan New England restrictions.

His memory of painting *Above the Clouds at Sunrise (Plate 22) must have been strong in these years. *Beacon, off Mount Desert Island and *An Old Boat (Plate 30) are acknowledged masterpieces among his Mount Desert works. Each derives from *Above the Clouds at Sunrise, and it is helpful to examine them together.

The boat and the beacon are placed near but not directly over the brightest spot on the horizon. This juxtaposition commands the viewer's attention; his eye is caught between foreground focus -- solid, touchable, and volumetric -- and the measureless brilliance beyond. Birds flying around the forms help to "charge" this space, increasing the sense of depth and volume. The distance between boat (or beacon) and sun is both small and very great, a reminder of how near the human soul is to its origins when the distance is not measured in hours or feet.

The sky in each painting reminds one of earlier works: Beacon off Mount Desert recalls the motion-filled sky of *Morning; *An Old Boat recalls View near Stockbridge. The triangular area of distant sky in *An Old Boat contains flat silk-like clouds which are faintly edged in light. These too exist in layers parallel to the picture plane (as do the cloud forms in Stockbridge).

The May 1851 Bulletin contained a tribute to Church's Mount Desert skies:

... He has chosen the pure ether for his region, and that panorama of gorgeous effects, of which the clouds and the sun are the ruling powers. His best things, in many respects, stop at the line of the horizon. The Beacon off Mount Desert Island is his most characteristic picture... worth almost as much in the sensations it produces, as a visit from the hot city in August to the still, cool seaside, where... the whole illimitable
expanse of sky and ocean is opened to your astonished eyes.6

Notes

1 Bulletin, page 81.
2 Warner, 1900.
3 Warner, 1900.
4 The Literary World called Beacon off Mount Desert "a strong and truthful picture with more imagination in its reality than the effort at the Deluge."
5 Plate 30 is the better reproduction. The luminous sky and water in *An Old Boat are present also in Beacon off Mount Desert.
6 Art-Union Bulletin (May 1851), page 23.
Plate 30
*An Old Boat*, 1851/1852.

Oil on canvas, 30 x 46 inches.

Signed and dated lower left: "F Church./1852."


Provenance: Source unknown before c.1900; James M. Cowan, Aurora, Illinois (until 1929).


See the discussion for *Beacon off Mount Desert* (Plate 29) for comments on this work. The last paragraph contains the critic's opinion: "His best things, in many respects, stop at the line of the horizon." This comment is irrelevant to *An Old Boat*, in which Church combines his skill in painting clear lake water with his now familiar, highly-detailed treatment of vegetation. The resulting ocean water resembles shimmering gelatin, carved and whipped into delicious patterns. It reflects and complements the sky, as the ground does in his best works.
Coastal Scene, Mount Desert, Maine or View of Newport Mountain, Mount Desert, 1851.

Oil on canvas, 21 1/4 x 31 1/4 inches.
Signed and dated 1851.
Owner: Private Collection.
Provenance: Source unknown before 1983; Sotheby Parke Bernet (June 1983).
Illustrations: Sotheby advertisements -- Antiques 123 (February 1983), page 291 (color); June 1983 Sotheby catalogue, figure 42 (color); Connoisseur 213 (June 1983), page 22.

Coastal Scene may reflect Cropsey's composition in Isle of Capri (Figure 69), but it antedates the coast views of John Frederick Kensett (from the late 1850's) and Fitz Hugh Lane (early 1860's). This painting and *Grand Manan Island, Bay of Fundy* (Plate 32) are two of Church's rare and tentative experiments with a prominent human figure in the landscape. Although these figures are not fully understood as grounded muscular forms, each plays an integral role in the composition. The man in Coastal Scene pulls on a curving rope which connects land and sea; his form visually balances the left foreground waves which appear to hold the other end of the rope and lift away from land (the rope is actually fastened to a small wrecked boat).

Church takes great pleasure in placing crystalline water and sky against more tactile forms. At Mount Desert, palpable rocks replace the familiar vegetation. These he studies and paints with relish. Among several dozen rock studies at Mount Desert, 1850, are Red Rocks, Mount Desert Island, Maine (Figure 70) and Mount Desert (Figure 71). Church understands the variety of rock forms here; in his hands they resemble massive cracked walls of ancient fortifications, lustrous colossal sculptures, and dark red
lumps of clay. He paints the latter form in Coastal Scene. These red rocks with velvet opaque surfaces offer the greatest contrast to light-filled water and air. However, there is little sense of atmospheric depth in Coastal Scene. Church may have sacrificed depth in order to emphasize the solid mass of his rock forms. His drawing (Figure 70) shows more facility in treating depth along the coast. The central shaded form here leads the viewer's eye around it and back into the open distance.
Plate 32
*Grand Manan Island, Bay of Fundy, 1852.
Oil on canvas, 21 1/4 x 31 3/8 inches.
Signed and dated lower left: "F Church/52."

Gallery Fund (1898).
Provenance: William Kemble (from 1852/1853).


Church visited Grand Manan Island off the Canadian coast twice in his youth, in the summers of 1851 and 1852 while he was at Mount Desert. The more northern island offered precipitous cliffs but little sunshine. Church chose to sketch here on rare clear days, using a limited palette of blues and browns. One splendid oil study is Cliffs at Grand Manan, c.1851/1852 (Figure 72), which seems to be preparatory to *Grand Manan Island, Bay of Fundy.¹

According to Theodore Stebbins, the sketches from Grand Manan are handled more confidently than the finished work, which contains an "awkward foreground figure."² The sun is centered (vertically) in the painting, and there is a charged space between sun and nearest form (the outermost rocks) which is similar to the focal area in *Above the Clouds at Sunrise, Beacon off Mount Desert, and *An Old Boat. However, the viewer's eye is not led from this strong focus around the sweep of the crescent
coast; the eye jumps down instead to the figure whose unfortunate stance and lighting make it unsubstantial and distracting. The reproduction exaggerates the prominence of the figure. In the painting, the fan-shaped rays of the sun lead the viewer from the figure back up into the sky, and the overall effect is a sense of radiant space similar to that in Hooker and Company (Plate 9).

Grand Manan Island is the same size as Coastal Scene (Plate 31), and is the more monumental and spacious of the two. The surface treatment of forms and the contrasts among textures are, as in all of Church's youthful works, satisfying.

Notes

1 The finished work has also been entitled Sunrise off the Maine Coast at Grand Manan, but the Atheneum uses the 1853 exhibition title.
2 Stebbins, Close Observation, page 17.
Plate 33

*Home by the Lake or Scene in the Catskills, 1852.*

Oil on canvas, 31 7/8 x 48 1/4 inches.

Signed and dated lower left: "F.E. Church 1852."

Owner: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gift of the T.B. Walker Foundation (1912).

Provenance: Henry Dwight, Jr. (from 1852); G.A. Broder, Brooklyn, New York (until January 1912).


City Art Museum of St. Louis, 1964), page 19; Romantic Vision in America (exhibition catalogue, Dallas: Museum of Fine Arts, 1971), no pagination (figure 21); Romantic Vision: 19th Century American Landscape Painting in the Walker Art Center Permanent Collection (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1978), pages 2-3 (detail) and pages 16-17 (color); "Hudson River Artists Walked with Nature," Modern Maturity 28 no. 3 (June-July 1985), pages 42-43 (color).

*Home by the Lake* has the most impressive exhibition history of any early work by Church.\(^1\) The generosity of the Walker Art Center in this regard is fortunate, because the work is one of the finest of the artist's career.\(^2\) Discussion of *Home by the Lake* will effectively conclude his early period; the remaining large painting *Mount Ktaadn* (Plate 36) introduces a phase beyond.

In the discussion of *New England Scenery* (Plate 27), the author suggested that the painting must have provided the sense of unity in ground and sky to be found in *Home by the Lake*. The mountain silhouettes and oval plains do repeat the general cloud formations, but the sense of unity here is the ability to move in any direction by following the patterns in the ground plane, a freedom of movement implicit in the sky. The viewer can follow oval paths, large and very small, throughout the landscape. The house is a small cabin with two sheds, yet it offers six wall faces along which the eyesight can travel. The cows form their own tiny oval composition. The color of the ground around them marks out a larger oval. The path of sight through a face of the cabin and around the nearby shadows is a still larger oval. The central shadowed plain is a great ellipse. Patterns in the distant sunny meadows reveal more curvilinear forms, and so on.

If the viewer takes a magnifying glass to this painting, he finds that any one area is a miniature landscape
with several open directions in which he can move. Plains of verdure alternate in strips of light and dark, each plain filled with clarity of detail. Only the most distant hills betray Church's use of naturalistic aerial perspective, where details grow dim as the hues lighten.

When Church included patterns of light and dark in the earlier paintings, he intended a semblance of naturalism -- a sky with lifting storm cloud and low sun, for example, where special light effects might be expected in nature. Here he drops such a semblance, and yet the panorama which spreads before the onlooker seems "true to nature." The pink light low in the right sky indicates a setting sun to the right, beyond view. In accordance with this light source, the central shadowed plain is blocked from the sun by the cliff. On the other hand, the lighting and shadows of the left foreground trees and cabin indicate that a strong light source is in the left sky. The Cole-like man and boat, and the forms in distant sunny fields, have little or no shadow, as though the sun were directly overhead. The arrangement of patterns in this landscape enlivens the viewer's path through it and provides a sense of space, as in previous landscapes; but the very special lighting provides the sense of unlimited space, giving a viewer the simultaneous experience of the landscape at several times of day.

This painting is a logical continuation of what Church has done in the past. Perhaps his process here was additive; he kept adding light and shadow until he got the proper expansive effect, and did not care about minor deviations from "nature." Perhaps his intentions were to show morning, noon, and late afternoon in the same setting -- to give the viewer a truthful picture of a day at "a home by the lake" and to provide an ongoing experience of the day by means of the skillfully-interlocked areas.
Notes

1 Since 1945, exhibition titles for this work have been variously *Scene in the Catskills*, *Scene in the Catskill Mountains*, and *Home by the Lake/Scene in the Catskills*.

2 It has not yet been critically evaluated, to the author's knowledge.
Plate 34

Vermont Scene, 1852.
Oil on canvas, 18 x 26 inches.
Signed lower right and dated 1852.
Owner: Private Collection.

Vermont Scene is one of a dozen or so paintings in this catalogue to have appeared in the art trade during the past ten years with little or no provenance. It may be a composite of sketches made in Vermont, New Hampshire, or other sites; or it may be a specific unidentified site. The composition relates to *Lake Scene in Mount Desert* (Plate 28), and to two identical views entitled at different times Mount Mansfield, Vermont, Scene in Vermont, Mount Hayes in New Hampshire, and Vermont Scenery (Appendix B, No.'s 8 and 9).
Plate 35
*The Natural Bridge, Virginia, 1852.
Oil on canvas, 28 x 23 inches.
Signed and dated 1852.
Owner: University of Virginia Art Museum, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Cyrus Field commissioned this work in 1851; the following year he took it with him to London and placed it on exhibit at the Royal Academy. Natural Bridge thus became the first painting by Church to be exhibited outside America. The Home Journal called it Church's "chef-d'oeuvre." Huntington mentions in his dissertation that Natural Bridge is "not an especially important painting."

Field was a self-made successful entrepreneur who took a few years' leave of absence from business on his family's advice to devote himself to travel, appreciation of the arts, and the attainment of a gentleman's education. These were the years, 1848-1855, he purchased paintings by Church. By 1850 Field had acquired an impressive library of travel, scientific, and critical literature. Prominent in his collection were the works of John Ruskin and the naturalist who shared many of Ruskin's ideas, Alexander von Humboldt. In 1850 Field probably owned the first two volumes of Humboldt's Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the
Universe and his "Picturesque Atlas" or *Vues des Cordillères*, one of the most beloved books of the nineteenth century.\(^1\)

The "Picturesque Atlas" described all the sites which Field and Church would visit on their trip to South America in 1853. Humboldt had made one trip to South America (1799-1804), and he spent the next forty years writing about it. His trip had been short and intensive – a direct cut across the northernmost piece of the continent just south of the Isthmus of Panama. The points of grandeur which he noted in "Picturesque Atlas" occur in one spot near the west coast at the northern tip of the Andes (which Humboldt designated "the Cordilleras"). These sites were the only ones which Church and Field would visit in 1853, strongly indicating that the two travelers used "Picturesque Atlas" as their guide.

This work may also have occasioned Church's visit to the Natural Bridge. Humboldt mentioned two North American sites, Niagara and the Natural Bridge of Virginia, in order to compare them negatively to the South American scenes. For example, he described the Natural Bridge, which has a clear height of thirty feet, in the same paragraph as the Natural Bridges of Icononzo, whose clear heights are more than nine hundred feet.\(^2\) In the summer of 1851, before Church went to Mount Desert, Field and his wife invited the young artist to accompany them on a trip to the Natural Bridge and other sites. Church accompanied them as far as the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky. At that point he left them to go to Mount Desert. Natural Bridge was the only painting to result from this trip.

Church may not have been enthusiastic about the work. He used either his own sketch or one by Daniel Wadsworth: *Natural Bridge, Virginia*, 1825 (Figure 73), and simply added the colors and textures which he remembered from the site.\(^3\) He gave Field the topographical rendering which he asked for. Isabella Field Judson tells this story:
[At the Natural Bridge] Mr. Field asked Mr. Church to make a sketch for a picture, and suggested that it would be wise to take a small piece of the rock back to New York. This Mr. Church did not think necessary, but Mr. Field was so intent upon having the color exactly reproduced that he put a bit in his [own] pocket. When the oil-painting was sent to his house he found the piece, and there had been no mistake made in the color.

There are dozens of rock samples, leaves, and other mementos from Church's travels at his home, Olana. His visual memory was first-rate, but he too may have brought back a piece of the Natural Bridge.

Church's painting does not have the sense of dramatic landscape movement in David Johnson's work of 1860 (Figure 74), or even the balanced design of Wadsworth's sketch (Figure 73). It is one of the rare finished works by Church which appears to record a natural scene without much thought.

Notes

1 Cosmos was translated into English by E.C. Otté. Publication began in London in 1849 and New York in 1850. Vues des Cordillères was published in folio edition in Paris in 1810, entitled Atlas pittoresque — Vues des Cordillères et monuments des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique. Smaller two-volume editions were published in Paris from 1813 and London from 1814.

2 See Plate IV in Vues des Cordillères, London, 1814.

3 The author has not been able to locate Church's drawing of the Natural Bridge.

4 Not too much is known about the life of David Johnson (1827-1908), who painted principally in the Adirondacks and briefly studied with Jasper Cropsey. His
best works seem to share Cropsey's strong draftsmanship and sense of structure.
Plate 36

*Mount Ktaadn*, 1853.

Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 55 1/4 inches.

Signed and dated on road, lower center: "F.E. Church -- 1853."


Provenance: Marshall Owen Roberts, New York (1853-1880); Roberts Estate (1880-January 19, 1897); American Art Association, New York (1897); Townsend Underhill, New York (from 1897); Mrs. John Slade (his granddaughter), Oyster Bay, New York (until 1967); Vose Galleries, Boston (1967); Mr. R. Frederick Woolworth, New York (1967-1969).


Late in the summer of 1852, after spending several months at Mount Desert and Grand Manan Islands, Church returned home by way of the rugged interior of Maine and visited Mount Ktaadn.\(^1\) This peak is the highest and most perfectly formed mountain in Maine; the Indian name means "highest land."\(^2\) Church seems to have been the first painter to see this mountain, although white men visited it from 1804 onward (mostly naturalists), and Thoreau saw it in 1846.\(^3\)

Church painted *Mount Ktaadn* in the fall of 1852. The painting presents an imaginary scene for the viewer to contemplate, just as the viewer's surrogate in the picture (under a left foreground tree) contemplates the scenery. In 1852 there was no civilization within fifty miles of the peak; the cows, houses, stagecoach, and other figures are Church's invention. Trevor Fairbrother relates *Mount Ktaadn* to the late serene landscapes by Thomas Cole such as *River in the Catskills*, 1843 (Figure 7):

In that work, Cole evokes a harmony between distant, rugged, unspoiled mountains and a fertile river valley with farms . . . . Although he followed Cole's precedent, Church confined all the incidental details to the foreground and developed a wider scenic perspective which allowed a more exhilarating visual experience.\(^4\)

Fairbrother continues:

... the endless vista of pink-bellied clouds [in Church's painting] seems to project out of the picture plane, while the lake and lowlands have the sense of nestling into the mountains. The painting is rich in detail, and yet is carefully crafted to give a strong, simple first impression: an uplifting sense of blissfully hushed natural splendor.\(^5\)
Either to create the strong first impression which Fairbrother suggests, or to evoke the sense of future time or visionary landscape, Church experiments with a new surface treatment on the distant forms: he lightens them (as usual) and gives them a velvety, napped surface. In late 1853, when he begins painting scenes from his South American trip, he will repeat this treatment in the distant forms (see Figure 75: *Mountains of Ecuador*, 1855). The surface of these towering, encompassing mountains is literally touchable, providing an intimate protective backdrop for the spacious meadow.

When Church paints *Andes of Ecuador* in 1855 (Figure 42), he may have in mind the composition as well as the treatment of aerial perspective in *Mount Ktaadn*. The waterfalls in *Andes of Ecuador* are a development of the right foreground in *Mount Ktaadn*. The water and vegetation dissolve and mix in the South American scene, and the distant mountains are more than velvety; they appear to melt. One of the most famous reviews of the painting called it "a picture of heat itself . . . mountains, tossed wildly together and melting in the torrid air."\(^6\)

*Above the Clouds at Sunrise* (Plate 22) may have predisposed Church to approach his spacious Mount Desert scenes as he did; *Mount Ktaadn* may have predisposed him to paint in the style of his South American works. However, his use of light to dissolve the forms (as in *Andes of Ecuador*) is only tentative in 1855, this author feels, and does not directly lead to the virtuoso light effects of his late works which would be criticized as feeble, as a breakdown of detail and structure.\(^7\) A year after he paints *Andes of Ecuador*, Church will paint another view of Mount Ktaadn: *Sunset*, 1856 (Figure 76), where he returns to the sense of space in his Mount Desert pictures. There is little evidence, in fact, in Church's later North American landscapes, that he ever went to South America.
sense of composition and space which he acquired before 1853 will serve him faithfully in the later North American works.

Notes

1 The modern spelling is "Mount Katahdin." The Yale title of Church's work retains the nineteenth-century spelling used by Thoreau and some others.
3 Thoreau, pages 3-4.
4 Trevor J. Fairbrother in New World, pages 238-239.
5 Fairbrother, page 239.
6 Harper's Weekly 11 (June 8, 1867), page 364.
7 See Note 3 in the discussion of Catskill Creek (Plate 2).
RICE UNIVERSITY

A CATALOGUE OF THE EARLY LANDSCAPES
OF FREDERIC CHURCH, 1844-1853

by

JENNY CAROLINE BAIRD

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

VOLUME II

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Houston, Texas
May, 1986
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