

Jacob Eichholtz Points The Way

By

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Jacob Eichholtz has never been without honor in his own country. Here in Lancaster men have been proud to have portraits by him in their homes, they have known their forebears better because Eichholtz painted them. So it is, too, round about, wherever portraits by him are to be found. The families or the institutions which possess those portraits treasure them. In my home town of Germantown, neighbors not very distant boast of portraits of their ancestors by Eichholtz. In Norristown he painted a Markley; in Philadelphia a Justice Marshall and a Captain Nice; and in Washington you will find a James Buchanan of his in the Smithsonian.

It is nevertheless true that Eichholtz, like so many Pennsylvania worthies, has not had the praise due him. He is much more than a mere imitator of Gilbert Stuart, more than a tyro whom Sully could patronize. He had the gift of catching a likeness; he painted realistically, trying to let the personality and character of his subject speak in the portrait. He was no flatterer. In his portraits of John Jacob Van Der Kemp and Eliza H., his wife, in the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia, his John Jacob is black avised, with a none too clean shave on upper lip and chin. He paints Eliza with no chin at all, which perhaps was better for John Jacob. The two portraits of the Van Der Kemps are rather small ones, fifteen inches wide, eighteen inches high, and are bright toned pictures. The picture of Justice Marshall here is dark, as is the picture of Governor Shulze. This last picture has so faded it takes a strong light to bring the face out of its dark background. As with Marshall, however, and the Van Der Kemps, this portrait is marked by individuality. His portrait of Justice Marshall occupies a very prominent place in the entrance hall on the first floor. That portrait is obviously a likeness. The portrait is individual, strongly marked by personality and revelatory of its subject's Scotch-Irish origin. It is a north of Ireland visage, not the slightest doubt of that. There are bushy eyebrows, high cheek bones and thin lips and a firm set to every feature. The fifth portrait in the Historical Society is that of Captain John Nice. As Captain Nice died in 1806, this portrait may have been painted from some other portrait or a sketch made before his death. Eichholtz had not begun to paint by 1806 with the firmness and dexterity and ability to catch a likeness that he displayed later. Nice has the characteristic long German nose, and a muffin mouth that you find more commonly among the descendants of the pirates out of Schleswig who settled on the east coast of England. This is to me the best portrait of the five. It is marked with race, with individuality, and it is of the time in which it was painted. All of these portraits are of the time of the "stock." By that I mean of the period when men wore elaborate open fronted waistcoats and equally elaborate stocks around their necks.

Jacob Eichholtz has been known of those who would know of him since 1834. Then an autobiography in little of his and a letter of Sully about him appeared in a *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* of William Dunlap. It is undeniably true, though, that he never came into the recognition to which he was entitled until William Uhler Hensel in 1912 wrote his memorable appreciation of Eichholtz in the proceedings of the Lancaster County Historical Society. He is recognized in the *Dictionary of American Biography* by a half-page sketch of his career.

In the Lancaster loan exhibition of portraits in 1912 there were over a hundred portraits by Jacob Eichholtz. They included pictures of many of Lancaster County's most prominent families. There were the portrait of Thaddeus Stevens, loaned by Pennsylvania College, Gettysburg, the portrait of James Buchanan, President of the United States, and the portraits of many governors and justices and lawyers.

One of the self portraits of Eichholtz reveals him as a man with deep-seated eyes and a most sensitive face. You understand from this self portrait, in which the artist is leaning forward as if at attention and eager to reply to take those he met on their grounds and who did not demand they adapt different people of so many varying personalities. Here was a man who could adjust himself sympathetically to this man and that, a man who was willing to take those he met on their grounds and who did not demand they adapt themselves to him.

Jacob Eichholtz is representative of the best of Pennsylvania, its cultivation so persistent and rich from Colonial times. In homes where hang portraits from his hand are Chippendale chairs and Hepplewhite tables, old glass from Germany, and glass in the German tradition made by the Wistars and by Stiegel, old silver and old books, old diaries and journals, deeds of land from the Penns and letters from old worthies, James Buchanan say or Thaddeus Stevens. In such homes are handed down stories about notables that have not found their way into print, revelations of a family devotion and a pride and a dignity that are far to seek today, simplicity and graciousness and the grand manner blended into a unity the secret of which we have lost.

There is no point in my presenting to you any detailed account of Eichholtz and his portraits. You have had two papers on the author and his work, one in 1912 by W. U. Hensel and one in 1925 by Mrs. Ida L. K. Hostetter. These two articles do full justice to Eichholtz. What I can do on this occasion, however, is to call attention to what there is in Lancaster County outside of portraiture that fairly cries out to be painted.

I know I am venturing on dangerous ground when I talk in Lancaster City about what is worthy of being painted in Lancaster County and other parts of Pennsylvania Dutchland. I do not know enough of what painting has been done around about Lancaster to know how many of these things that I shall list as worthy of being painted have already been painted. So far as I know the situation, however, art in Lancaster County has been a

thing of the center. Our artists have been concerned with portraits of men of importance. I would like to see added to such portraiture a landscape art revelatory of all phases of our valley and mountain land, and an art which recorded the picturesquenesses of many of our local avocations. I would like to see here in Lancaster, for instance, a landscape art commensurate with that we find in New Hope on the Delaware in Bucks County and north of New Hope in the Delaware valley. I would like to see local Redfields and Rosens, Garbers and Pearsons.

The curb market in old days in Lancaster had more than a score of characteristic scenes well worthy of being painted. I have caught from under Mennonite bonnets blandishing glances that insured a sale. I have seen an open-faced and earnest young Amishman twitch the breast bone of a chicken with a dexterity that showed the fowl possessing it was young. I have had a group of Plain Clothes people pack little dainties in pie crust for me, one contributing soft paper, another a box, and the third advice. Such a group falls naturally into a picture.

On September 28th, 1935, I passed several little bits by the roadside that should be painted. One was an Amish woman of substantial proportions sweeping up the leaves of a little bally catalpa tree with a brush into a basket. The lawn from which she swept them was immaculate. Her cap was fetching. She was a daughter of Eve.

I tried once to get a distinguished Philadelphia artist to go to Churchtown by nine of a Sunday morning to see the Amish wagons coming in to a meeting house nearby. Those old boys in the deep recesses of their wagons were extremely picturesque with shaven upper lip and beards trimmed quite like those of the apostles at the Last Supper. In many of these wagons drawn by pacing horses or mules were whole families, father and mother and rosy-cheeked young ones. My artist, of course, never did get to Churchtown. He hadn't been properly brought up on the higher provincialism, which demands that all the picturesque things and essential things of the provinces shall be treated with an art of the center.

This same road that revealed the sweeping Amish woman and the Amish families in their wagons passes a schoolhouse, a little red schoolhouse, where you may see long breeched and broad brimmed small boys playing with girls of like diminutiveness, bonneted and dressed in solid gay colors.

There is an herb garden of a powwow man not far from Lebanon that should be painted. The proprietor himself with merry little eyes, deep-seated and sharp, and deprecatory manner, should be the center of that orderly arrangement of parterres.

There should be painted Joseph Lehn turning and painting his little utensils of wood in his shop in the Hammer Creek valley. He should be painted well toward the end of his long life but while he was still using a brush rather than decalcomanias. He was a man of infinite kindness and appeal to his fellow men. He had a shrewd look but the goodness in him overcame the shrewdness.

There should be a landscape of Hirsch Thal in the level light of evening. I will remember a curve of the road, in early June, with a snake fence, and beyond it a paddock with cows, and beyond that a barnyard and the white pickets of the dooryard and the white walls of a trim farmhouse.

There should be a picture of the Saal in Ephrata with the brothers and sisters singing. The detail should be exact, the books they held and sang from, the Capuchin-like gowns of the men and the quaint dresses of the sisters.

There should be a picture of a Dunkard love feast. I remember well more than fifty years ago the first one of these I saw. It was in Lebanon County and the simplicity and reverence of it all has left an impression that the years have not dimmed.

There should be a painting of a Mennonite funeral in Bucks County at Deep Run. It should be at the moment when the people were at the grave side. There should be a background of wagons, for I saw this in the old days, and great pots of boiling coffee and long tables at which people might sit and eat. I still can see the grove of white oaks between meeting house and graveyard and I still can hear the rustle of the wind in the leaves clinging to the lower branches of those young trees.

There should be a picture of a Schwenkfelder Thanksgiving day, preferably before my time, when the women used to wear those great white kerchiefs about their shoulders, and the apple butter was real apple butter, and the long loaves of bread were cooked in outdoor ovens. I am thinking of a churchyard in Montgomery sixty years ago.

There should be a picture of a dragon snorting along in flight in a little valley that reaches from Plum Creek to the limestone quarry on Bickels' place. That should have for background the great Hiester mansion.

There should be a picture of Stiegel's return to his glass works in a chariot pulled by the white plumed horses and in the background the band on the roof that was a feature of all such homecomings.

There should be more portraits of the order of that which shows Peter Muhlenberg in the pulpit throwing off his gown and displaying his Continental uniform.

There should be Conrad Weiser at parley with the Indians.

There should be a picture of Herbie Beck calling down snipe about him in a moonlit field of shocked corn.

There should be a picture of Martin Grove Brumbaugh breaking a log jam on the Juniata. He ran out with a stick of dynamite over the tumbled logs and exploded his charge, reaching the bank safely over the moving mass.

There should be a picture of Joseph Leidy telling his college class of trichonymphos. It happened that he had been at a performance of Meyerbeer's "Robert the Devil" the night before he saw this amœba under the magnifying glass, so, when it swam into his ken, it reminded him of the ballet

girls with skirts of waving rope that had risen out of coffins on the stage to delight the bizarre taste of an audience of yesteryear. The old gentleman used to begin to blush slightly when he came to this part of his lecture. I sat with a man who had flunked the course the year before and he said, "Now Leidy's going to tell his trichonymphos story. Watch him blush." It was the mention of the ballet girls, I suppose, that brought blushes in that remote time.

There should be a picture of Billmyer's printing shop in Germantown with the old printer sticking type and working hand presses from which came "garlands" of hymns.

There should be a picture of a wood-wind musical instrument maker melting down Mexican silver dollars to make stops for his flutes and piccolos, and the eager-eyed boy with thrilled face watching him.

There should be a picture of a brass turner's house of log walls and red-tiled roof with an old man sitting on the stoop inlaying with brass the iron handle of a ladle.

There should be a picture of the two doctors, a meeting of the man trained at medical school and of the powwow man, the regular practitioner envious of the healing qualities of the salve the powwow man concocts.

There should be a picture of an old clergyman, Lutheran, in his canonicals, painting birds on Easter eggs, in the hills outside of Quakertown.

There should be a picture of Jacob Medinger at the potter's wheel looking over his spectacles, with those kindly eyes of his, and down past that long medieval German nose that took you back to old prints.

There should be a picture of a white owl at the window, that perhaps in the upper left-hand part of the painting, and the accident the bird's appearance portended displayed on the rest of the canvas, the horses running home leaving their master in his smashed wagon on the railroad track.

There should be a picture of the reunion in 1888 of the members of the regiment who fought at Gettysburg in 1863. There should be the depiction of a quarrel between a one-legged man who was so sure that he had lost his leg at a certain fence panel that he emphasized his belief by bringing his crutch down over the ridge of the skull of the friend who was sure he carried him back from a fence panel three rods away.

Those are all characteristically Dutch scenes. Here are another twenty-odd well worth painting but not so natively Dutch. You might find most of them anywhere from Dan to Beersheba. For instance, the red face above gray chin whiskers of an old tramp peering out of a limekiln in which he had taken refuge from the rain. That I saw Saturday, September 28th, where the Ridge Road runs into the Conestoga Road.

Men finding water with the use of a divining rod. Let that be in a swale where stand wild crab apple trees with soft pink and fragrant blossoms.

There should be the homecoming of a bride to the manorial home of Spring Forge back of Goodville, not so many miles from where we are. Jacob Eichholtz painted, by the bye, one of the Jacobs girls of that home in her bloom.

There might be a picture of a man from Schoeneck in Lancaster at sea on a whaler off Tristan da Cunha, that lonely island of the South Seas. He might be presented as carving a curiously involved pie wheel out of whale ivory.

There might be a picture of egrets on mud flats under Chickies Rock.

There should be a picture of basket weaving at Mentznerville above Schoeneck in northern Lancaster.

There should be a picture of Neddie Mumma making a fyke or funnel-shaped net to catch suckers in their spring rush up Cocalico.

There should be a picture of a well-known auctioneer crying a sale at Schnoekerstettel.

There should be a picture of town ball, the original of base ball, at Waterford on the Juniata, this in 1887-88, or a picture of old Sarvis reciting ballads as he worked over his harness in the same village.

There should be a picture of the fox hunt at Schoeneck in northern Lancaster with certain well known Lancastrians, some of them here present, in scarlet and white ready to take horse. The outline of the faces of the friendly dogs above the edge of the truck in which they are brought to the field should be a feature of that picture.

There should be a picture of Ulysses sampling wine in a cellar within hail of Lebanon. There could be about twenty kinds of wine, bottled or barreled, in that cellar.

There should be a picture of rafting on the Susquehanna that was a usual sight in my young years. The background might be the hills above Duncannon.

Another most characteristic scene of southeastern Pennsylvania is that of a smokehouse or ground cellar, well stored with food. In a painting of the latter, there should be such verisimilitude that the strings of smoked sausage would impart their inimitable odor to all who look at the picture.

Something of a revelation would be a straw-roofed sheep fold at Rocky Spring in the Cumberland valley, with the friendly creatures crowding in under it out of a pelting April storm.

There might be some difference of opinion about the humanity of another subject, that of a kindly old lady with an eel impaled on an eel hook at her back door, skinning the creature alive. That was a daily scene when I summered on the head waters of the Tuscarora.

The soft and reposeful tone on the countenance of the butcher that made his rounds about Paradise and Leaman Place should be caught just as he was blowing his horn. This is another memory of mine of fifty years ago.

A row of bee hives of straw on an adzed platform where the road runs up against the Hexenkopf would make a pleasant foreground to the white paling fence and white chinked log walls of the house of the bee keeper.

The cabinet maker's shop knee deep with shavings and saw dust but never catching fire used to cause me wonder in my boyhood visits to Lebanon. I should like to have someone who knew it preserve it for me in oil.

A wheelwright's shop with a wheelwright shaping a gum maul by a branch of Perkiomen is another picture that comes to me out of the past. I would like to have that, too.

A resolute lady of my acquaintance likes to tell of how her equally resolute mother killed a copperhead with a hoe when she, resolute lady No. 2, tried as a child to play with it on the front stoop of a log house, back of Fivepointville. I can see the satisfaction in the elder woman's face, as she saw the snake drop in halves under the hoe.

Other pictures, that I should like to have, are that of an Amishman against the long leaf tobacco plants in his drying barn near Terre Hill; a herd of cattle stampeding through a covered bridge not far from Philadelphia; the folks of a Berks County farm scratching a pet trout as he came up between the milk pans in a springhouse; a charcoal burner with his face alight with the glow that came from the stoke hole in the bottom of the charcoal pile; a cooper shop with the cooper making barrels; and a portrait of that unsubduable old Lancastrian, Abe Buzzard, at the door of his dug-out up in the Welsh mountains.

A gallery in which hung fifty pictures, such as I have suggested, would be a quintessentialization of much of Pennsylvania, a proof of the richness and variety of our culture, a place of beauty that we could be proud of down the years, a revelation to the folks of other states who ask us what Pennsylvania stands for.