

ARTHUR ARMSTRONG.

One of the best-known names in the galaxy of artists who adorn the roll of Lancaster county's honored sons is that of Arthur Armstrong, portrait, landscape and historical painter. His is the distinction of being born, reared, educated and living his life among our people. He was born in Manor township, in the year 1798. His father's name was James Armstrong, and the family was related to General Armstrong, who was Secretary of War during President Madison's administration.

Unfortunately, few facts concerning his early life have come down to us, which seems all the more singular in the light of the after reputation he made for himself. His education was, no doubt, that which the local schools of that day could offer. That he was a very well-informed and intelligent man the writer can testify, having seen and heard him frequently a year or two before his death. The earliest record of his artistic life that I have found dates back to about the year 1820, when, at the age of twenty-two years, he opened a studio in the borough of Marietta, where the late Judge John J. Liebhart became one of his students, acquiring no little proficiency in portrait painting, and one of whose efforts was a portrait of Gen. Simon Cameron, which has been highly spoken of. That, no doubt, was the place where his public career as an artist began. The eminent miniature painter, J. Henry Brown, was also one of Armstrong's pupils. Why he

preferred the country town to the capital city is left to conjecture. How long he remained in the river town and when he came to Lancaster is unknown.

The first contemporary notice we have of Mr. Armstrong dates back to December, 1849, which reads as follows: "We were very much gratified with a recent visit we paid to the gallery of Mr. Arthur Armstrong, in the Mechanics' Institute.¹ Mr. Armstrong, we believe, is a native of this city, and if talents of the highest order as an artist, combined with suavity of manners and an exceedingly accommodating disposition, deserve ample encouragement, then he is richly entitled to it at the hands of the public.

"His paintings—and his gallery is ornamented with some splendid productions from his pencil which exhibit taste, skill and production of the highest order of genius—are well worthy a visit from all of our citizens in town and country. We intend, when we have a little more leisure, to renew our visit, and take a note of his most celebrated paintings for publication. We hope that Mr. Armstrong will be liberally patronized as a native, and he is eminently deserving of it."

Alas for the good intentions set forth in the last sentence! Whether written by the editor or reporter of the "Intelligencer," the promise was never fulfilled. I hung on the trail until the period of Armstrong's death, but never an additional word was found.

How long Mr. Armstrong kept his studio in the Mechanics' Institute there are no present means of determining, but it could not have been for long, because a writer in the "Examiner" writes as follows: "Arthur Armstrong was born in Manor township,

and was long and well known to Lancastrians. He aspired high, built a fine studio of classical design on Orange street (on the north side, about half way between North Queen and Christian streets) and fitted up the second story as a gallery to exhibit paintings. We remember Hamlet and Ophelia and the Assassination of Caesar, which were works of great size; and he also had a large collection of engravings, which he took great pleasure in showing to a few select friends..... He was a genial, kindly-hearted man, and had numerous pupils, some of whom speak kindly of him to this day."

As most people know, and as all can well understand, the portrait painter's profession in a small city at that day was neither well patronized nor profitable, and Mr. Armstrong was compelled to enter the lower forms of using the brush. As the eminent Benjamin West is said at one period of his career to have painted tavern signs and similar things to eke out his early needs, so, too, our friend Armstrong also resorted to these "pot boilers," and painted signs and made and gilded picture frames when more desirable patronage was not forthcoming.

That he did this lower class of work well may be taken for granted, but we have also strong testimony to the fact. In an appreciative, but all too meagre, biographical sketch of him in Harris' Biographical History of Lancaster County we find the following, which is copied from an unnamed "contemporary:" "It does not require a connoisseur in the fine arts to discover something remarkable in the style of Mr. Armstrong's paintings; he leaves nothing in the dark for the imagination to work out; it is bold and distinct, and yet the distance is

kept in such a natural harmony as to give it at once that ease and softness essential to the art. The picture (the one the contemporary describes) is one on rich blue silk, and is intended as a banner for the Washington Fire Company of Louisville, Kentucky. The back of the canvas represents the Washington family, which is not a mere convening of the bare material, but with a persevering assiduity the artist has left nothing unfinished. The scene is under the portico of the mansion at Mt. Vernon, and consists of the domestic family circle. In the distance is seen the Potomac, studded with sails. In short, the whole is beautifully worked out, and more worthy the gallery than the back of a banner. This splendid piece of workmanship reflects a character of no ordinary degree on its author, and it must be a source of gratification to himself as well as to his friends that the reputation he has gained by his late productions secures for him the patronage which his genius so richly merits. Mr. Armstrong is an eminent artist indeed."

But little is known of Mr. Armstrong's earlier years. It is not known who his preceptors were, but it is known to his family that for a time he was under instructions from a Philadelphia artist. That Mr. Armstrong enjoyed the confidence of his fellow-citizens is seen in the fact that when on July 8, 1829, the Mechanics' Society was organized, he was elected treasurer of the organization. He married Miss Harriet Wentz, of this city. His children were James T. Armstrong, also an artist, but who died comparatively young; Amanda Haldeman, Elizabeth Groff and Margaret Katherine Kerfoot. Two daughters, Helen and Harriett, died young.

Two of his daughters, the Misses Amanda Haldeman and Elizabeth Groff, survive, and their home at No. 406 North Duke street is filled with mementoes of their gifted father's art and labors. Elizabeth G., the younger of the daughters, seems to have inherited some of her father's genius, as several examples of her handiwork with the brush clearly show.

Arthur Armstrong died on June 18, 1851, at the comparatively early age of fifty-three years.

Mr. Armstrong seems to have been a prolific painter. A goodly number of his pictures are still in this locality, but many more were taken elsewhere. His surviving daughters still have on the walls of their home the following examples of his skill with the brush:

1. Portrait of his daughter, Amanda.
2. Portrait of his daughter, Elizabeth.
3. Portrait of his son, James.
4. Fine picture of his wife with her young daughters by her side.
5. Portrait of his daughter, Margaret Katharine, at a youthful age.
6. An excellent portrait of himself at mature manhood.
7. Portrait of himself at mere youthful period.
8. Portrait of Mrs. Margaret Haldeman, his sister-in-law.
9. Portrait of his daughter, Helen, who died young.
10. Portrait of his daughter, Harriet, who died young.
11. Portrait of Mrs. Thomas Wentz.
12. Portrait of Mrs. Catharine Wentz.
13. Fruit piece—peaches, grapes, watermelons, etc.
14. The entombment of Christ—five large figures on canvas, which is of large size, now owned by J. B. Lich-ty, of Lancaster.
15. Portrait of the late Mrs. Christian

- Gast, owned by Mrs. Annie E. Martin.
- 16-17. Portraits of the late Emanuel Schaeffer and second wife, property of Miss Lou Herr, of Philadelphia.
18. Portrait of Mrs. Dr. John Levergood, owned by herself.
- 19-20. Edwin and Susan Schaeffer.
21. Portrait of Mrs. John Herr, owned by M. Louise Herr.
22. Portrait of Mrs. W. E. Heinitsh, owned by her daughter, Miss Margaret Heinitsh.
23. A portrait owned by Miss Susan C. Frazer, of Hon. William Frazer.
24. A portrait of James Jefferies, owned by Miss Susan Jefferies.
25. A portrait of Col. John W. Forney, owner unknown.
26. A portrait in oil of Michael Breneman.
27. A portrait in oil, on wooden panel, of Kitty Snyder.
28. A small portrait in oil, on wooden panel, of gentleman whose name is written on the back, but is undecipherable.
29. Picture of Fort McHenry.
30. Picture of two of W. E. Heinitsh's children.

The pictures 26, 27 and 28 are in the possession of Mr. John Breneman.

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