

A PICTURE OF WASHINGTON BY A LANCASTER ARTIST

Some months ago, in a discussion concerning certain oil paintings of Washington, Mr. Stans V. Henkels, of Philadelphia, who for a long time has been one of the leading book auctioneers in this country and also an expert on that subject, mentioned a picture of Washington, painted by Jacob Eicholtz. He gave me a unique and interesting narrative about it, and, as we claim Jacob Eicholtz as our own, I thought the story ought to be perpetuated. This seemed to me particularly appropriate, as even Professor William H. Miller, Mr. Eicholtz's grandson, had never heard of a portrait of Washington painted by his grandfather, except the large picture of "Washington and His Generals" mentioned by Mr. Hensel in his life of Jacob Eicholtz. I, therefore, asked Mr. Henkels to write down definitely the facts he had gathered, and I now give you the story in his own words:

"Speaking of the evolution of a portrait, I think the following anecdote relating to my business career ought not to be lost. In the spring of 1883, George W. Huffnagle called upon me in reference to making a sale of certain curios which had been gathered by his brother, Dr. Charles Huffnagle, the first United States Consul to Calcutta, India. Dr. Huffnagle had secured many rare curios concerning the Indies and the Orient, and these were deposited in a large mansion built by him at New Hope, Bucks county, Pennsylvania. The Huffnagles had married into the family of Colonel Isaac Franks, of Revolutionary fame. The latter was a personal friend of General Washington. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia, Colonel Franks rented his house, in Germantown, to President Washington, and, while the house was furnished at that time, the President added much to its contents. After the fever epidemic was over, the house again came into the possession of Colonel Franks, and it was finally inherited by the Huffnagle family. Much of the furniture used by General Washington at the time of his occupancy of this mansion was moved by Dr. Huffnagle to his estate at New Hope. Among these effects was a life-size, bust, oil portrait of General Washington, painted by Jacob Eicholtz for Colonel Franks.

"Mr. Huffnagle called upon me and arranged for the sale of the above mentioned curios and relics, and the sale of them took place at my gallery, No. 1117 Chestnut street, some time in 1883. He intended to include therein the Eicholtz portrait; but at that time there was in Philadelphia a certain dealer in art, named Hugh A. McCann, who was a constant visitor at my sales rooms, and, through this means, McCann became acquainted with Mr. Huffnagle. When Mr. Huffnagle mentioned the Eicholtz portrait to him, he immediately offered to buy it at private sale, and they were not long in coming to terms. Thus McCann got possession of this picture. Later on certain dealings with McCann led me to inform him that he was no longer welcome at my place of business.

"Several years went by, and, at the death of a member of the firm of M. Thomas & Sons, Auctioneers, several of their clerks left that firm and started the auction house of Ellis & Shaw, on Chestnut street, near Tenth. They

advertised a sale of historical portraits, and, being interested, I visited their gallery to inspect their offerings. There I saw the portrait of Washington by Eicholtz hanging on the wall. A considerable amount of color had been added to the face and the name of the artist had been changed to that of Charles Willson Peale. There were many other frauds of like character in the sale, the major part of which I found belonged to Mr. McCann. I informed the firm of these facts, and the spurious pictures were withdrawn from the sale. Several years again rolled by when Mr. McCann brought to my rooms a portrait of an unknown gentleman, three-quarter length, life-size, seated in a chair. I asked him where he got it, and he said he had purchased it at M. Thomas & Sons' auction rooms for fifteen dollars. He did not know who it was nor by whom it was painted, but he did know that it came from an old Philadelphia Quaker family. In a spirit of jest, I said to him, "By golly, Mac, that's Gouverneur Morris, by Gilbert Stuart." He immediately replied, "You are right," and he cut the central portion of the picture out, making the canvas about the usual size adopted by artists in painting bust portraits. This he carried away with him, and left the remainder of the picture with me.

About a year or two after this McCann made a sale with the firm of George A. Leavitt & Company, Auctioneers, of New York. The late Charles Steigerwalt, of Lancaster, attended this sale and made several purchases, for which he gave his promissory note to the auction house, leaving the pictures as security until the note was paid. The note fell due on a certain Friday (I do not recollect the date) and Steigerwalt made a special trip to New York to pay it. On his way to that city he called upon and informed me that he had purchased the "only portrait of Gouverneur Morris, by Gilbert Stuart," and also a very fine picture of General Washington by the same artist. I told him he had better bring them over that afternoon and let me see them, and this he did. Lo, and behold, there was my old friend again, the portrait of Washington, by Eicholtz, bearing the name of Gilbert Stuart as the artist. McCann had touched it up again and concluded it looked more like the work of Stuart than of Peale, upon whom he had first bestowed the honor of painting it. The portrait of the old Quaker gentleman, which McCann had cut out of the larger canvas, had on it the name of Gouverneur Morris, by Gilbert Stuart. I informed Mr. Steigerwalt of the fraud which had been practiced upon him, and advised him at once to get an attorney and attach the funds in the hands of the auctioneers. It took me some time to get it through his head that this was the only course for him to pursue to save himself from being robbed. I recollected that I had the old canvas from which the alleged Gouverneur Morris portrait was cut on the fourth floor of my place of business, and this I brought down, and as the portrait Steigerwalt had fitted exactly into the centre of it, this fact convinced Mr. Steigerwalt that he had been defrauded. I then introduced him to an attorney, a Mr. Randall, of Philadelphia, and proceedings were immediately started against the New York auction house. The auctioneers then appealed to McCann to authenticate the portraits, and this, of course, he could not do. He, however, consented to take them back. It was only after long waiting that the amount paid for the paintings by Steigerwalt was refunded to him.

"Several years elapsed again, when there was a sale at Freeman's auction house, 12th and Walnut streets, in which was included a portrait of Washington, by Charles Willson Peale. Mr. Henry Chapman, of Philadelphia, purchased this portrait. He brought it into my office, which was then at Davis & Harvey's, and to my surprise I found it was my old friend again who had visited me. It was the old portrait of Washington, painted for Colonel Franks, by Eicholtz, but with the name of Charles Willson Peale attached as the painter. Mr. McCann having come to the conclusion that his first attribution

was the best. Of course, Mr. Chapman had no trouble in getting the auctioneers, who are honorable people, to take the picture back, as they sold it entirely on the assertion of Mr. McCann as to its authorship. This is the last I saw of it. I heard that it went to California, but where it is now, I do not know. The peculiar feature attached to the whole transaction is, that, if McCann had let the picture remain in its original state and had sold it as a portrait by Eicholtz, he could have gotten almost as much for it as if it had been painted by Stuart or Peale. The picture was a copy by Eicholtz of the celebrated Atheneum portrait of Washington, by Stuart; was painted, as I have said, to the order of Col. Franks; and it represented Eicholtz at his very best."

In this connection, it may not be inappropriate to speak of another picture of Washington. Upon the walls of the room in which you are now meeting hangs a painting of Washington with no mark of its origin upon it. Accidentally, I discovered where it came from. When John Michael kept the Grape Hotel, on North Queen street, it hung somewhere in that house, his wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Michael having obtained it from a batchelor brother, Samuel Dietrich. She presented it to Thomas Fordney, the son of Mr. Thomas P. Fordney, who at present resides in Manheim township, just outside the city limits. The young man, tiring of it, or at least not wishing to keep it, sold it to Miss Eliza E. Smith, and, when Miss Smith presented this building and all the contents to the A. Herr Smith Memorial Library, the picture came along. No one, so far as I can find, knows by whom it was painted, and those of the older generation who might have enlightened us have, I think, all passed away. It is, I think, after the popular picture of Gilbert Stuart above mentioned, though some of its characteristics in pose may not be exactly the usual type of the Stuart pictures. I place these facts upon the record, so that in the future it may be known from whence the picture came.

Author: Landis, Charles Israel, 1856-1932.

Title: A picture of Washington by a Lancaster artist / by Judge C. I. Landis.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Eichholtz, Jacob, 1776-1842.
Artists--Pennsylvania--Lancaster.
Portrait painters--Pennsylvania--Lancaster.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1928

Description: 27-29 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 22,
no. 2

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.22

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address