

JACOB WILLIAM DEICHLER

Artist & Shoemaker

1847 — 1921

A SKETCH

The historians have ever emphasized the conglomerate character of the population of the United States, and it is well-known that a clever Hebrew writer has wittily termed it "The Melting Pot of the World". Lancaster County may be regarded as a characteristic unit in this particular.

The various nations of the old world have contributed elements of entirely different character. For instance the English were able constructive administrators—the Hibernians supplied initiative and a marked sense of humor—the Germans supplied largely the brawn for our agricultural development, and also that persistency peculiar to them which makes them great scientists and their idealism which makes them philosophers and artists. Many other nations have contributed their quota of valuable characteristics.

And so when an artist of Lancaster is known to have painted a portrait of his paternal grandmother, which strongly suggests the general treatment and technique of the great Hultz of the Netherlands, and when that portrait has been recognized as remarkable and given an honored place on the historic walls of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (in 1917), creating a sensation among the critics, it is not unnatural that we should be keenly interested in that painter's lineage, also his environment, life and accomplishments. The painter referred to is the late Jacob William Deichler, born in Lancaster City, August 18th, 1847. He was of Teutonic origin, inheriting many of the qualities and characteristics of that race as noted above. His paternal grandfather was Maximilian Deichler—whose wife's maiden name was Catherine Messner—both of whom were natives of Baden Baden, Germany. In the year 1819 the mayor of that noted town wished to possess himself of their residence, and upon their refusal to sell it, threatened to build all around their property, so they finally sold their home intending to devote the proceeds of same to the purchase of a farm in America, to which country they immigrated, landing in Baltimore in 1820, with two sons, the elder of which was Maximilian, who afterwards became Father of the subject of our sketch. It is further known that the severe military life in Germany was another cause for the elder Maximilian coming to America. He must have been extremely generous, for he paid the passage fare of 8 friends or neighbors on the same vessel, evidently without proper appreciation, for only one of the 8 repaid him. Dame tradition tells us that on the stormy passage across the Atlantic, the wonderful old treasure chest or strong box belonging to the elder Deichler was stolen or pilfered, involving the loss of gold coin the proceeds of the sale of their home and other treasures of considerable value. These immigrants went from Baltimore to Philadelphia and it was probably due to his recent reverses that Maximilian, the elder, died about ten days after he landed. The widow with two sons and friends came to Lancaster, and put the two boys on a farm. She rented a room here for herself and sewed uppers on shoes for a livelihood.

It is evident that Maximilian, the 2nd, learned the craft of shoemaking and later established himself on North Queen Street, about 150 feet north of Penn Square, on the east side, where he prospered at a time when people were shod with hand-made to order shoes. His son, Jacob William, sub-

ject of this sketch, was born August 18th, 1847, and followed his Father's trade, having studied in the public schools of our city. We have no means of knowing what tendency towards artistic work he showed or developed in his early life. His Father, however, tradition tells us, though averse to his taking up artistic work as a vocation, nevertheless sent him (with his young wife) to Philadelphia in 1870 to study the arts under Carl Lindeimann, a German artist, under whose instruction the young artist benefitted by excellent technical training, and remained in the city during the Centennial Celebration of our Independence, in 1876, painting original portraits and copies of portraits,—painting landscapes from nature in the beautiful suburbs of Philadelphia, painting banners, silk flags, and other decorative work for masonic and other orders. We may well imagine the great delight which young Deichler experienced in studying the artistic productions of the nations which were exhibited at the Exposition and that it enlivened his imagination and increased his desire to produce the work which he afterwards accomplished. Another aid to his art cultivation was a series of visits which he made to an artist friend in New York, by the name of Frank Kline, when they probably visited the galleries of the metropolis, where the best art of the day was to be seen.

The artist's Father was not reconciled to his pursuance of art as a vocation until he saw the masterly portrait which he had painted of his grandmother and then was so convinced of the unusual talent of his son, that he commissioned him to paint his own portrait and that of his wife. It was then that Jacob Deichler returned to Lancaster again entering the shoe business, but with the reservation of several days in the week to be devoted to his art. He however, abandoned the shoe business entirely, about 1878, and devoted his entire time to his art work, living at 413 West Walnut Street. From the latter date to 1912 there is a long span of years of which we have no data, but doubtless he worked with a persistency that was peculiar to him— including the painting of many portraits of which we regret we have no record.

At the time of the Loan Exhibition of Historical and Contemporary Portraits in 1912, under the auspices of the Iris Club and the Lancaster County Historical Society, Jacob Deichler exhibited portraits of Captain William Ankrum, Mrs. Catherine Deichler, (the artist's paternal grandmother), Maximilian Deichler (his Father), and the copy of Linderman's General Ulysses S. Grant. It is probably owing to this exhibition of his grandmother's portrait, that it was in 1917 exhibited as previously stated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, under such auspicious circumstances. From 1917 to 1921 is another long period without data, the latter being the year in which the artist died, on October 6th.

About the middle of May, 1924, there appeared in the window of the residence of the late Jacob Deichler, 413 West Walnut Street, a card stating that household goods were for sale and inspection, and it was found, however, that these wares consisted of about 100 oil paintings of the deceased artist, which were about to be stored in the third floor, until it might be decided what disposition could be made of them by the executor of the estate, Robert Deichler, son of the deceased. The writer of this article suggested that an effort be made to exhibit these paintings, on account of their historical and artistic value, with the further purpose of disposing of them as a collection or in part. The second floor of what was formerly the Examiner Building on North Queen Street was secured and the paintings immediately hung and exhibited under the auspices of a voluntary committee consisting of Herbert H. Beck, Mrs. Charles S. Foltz, Robert Deichler, and Walter C. Hager. The admission to the exhibition was by card, and a circular was sent to the various art organizations in Pennsylvania and New York and a number of connoisseurs visited the exhibition. There also at this time appeared several

illustrated articles in our daily papers which created renewed interest in the work of the artist. The collection may be classified as follows:—

Original Portraits—original landscapes—original religious pictures—copies of Shakespearian subjects, of religious subjects, of general subjects, and wall decorations.

The most remarkable portrait was doubtless that of his grandmother, previously referred to, a convincing portrait of an elderly woman of foreign birth, which might rank with the best portraits by Lancaster's most celebrated portrait painter, Jacob Eicholtz, although it has little in common with the latter master's work. There was shown too the portrait of the artist's Father, and that of his Mother—the former approaching in artistic value that of the portrait first mentioned. Next an original group of two children—sisters-in-law of the artist—after the manner of Sir Joshua Reynolds—the canvas measuring 40" x 50". This work is probably the most pictorial and original product of the artist, subject being "The Crowning of the May Queen", and we may view this painting with satisfaction as the creation of a Lancaster artist—the lower head is beautifully drawn and charmingly colored—there is, however, a quaintness and even an awkwardness in the composition which reveals lack of experience in the artist. There were two portraits of the artist himself and an extremely interesting portrait of the artist's wife (on his largest canvas 70" x 53")—the artist doubtlessly intended to create a monumental and unusual work. The accessories are decidedly crude, but the head and shoulders are well executed in a manner suggesting Spanish treatment. The next painting is one of which there is some mystery, although there is a definite tradition that it is a portrait of Hans Herr, the progenitor of the Herr Family in Lancaster County, but we do not know at the present writing what original or other data the head was based on. Without a stretcher, on a canvas 19" x 14" it is painted technically in a different manner from that usual with Deichler, so that it may be questioned whether he really painted it. It is rich in coloring of the facial parts and of the great flowing mane and beard. This work, whatever its foundation may be, is treated in the idealistic manner of the Italian Masters, representing as it does a spiritual patriarch. It is particularly interesting to note that there are many members of the Herr Family who have the singular type of countenance portrayed. It is thought that this painting should be preserved in Lancaster.

Another portrait which it is thought should be treasured here is that of Ulysses S. Grant, admirable, though a copy, and technically well painted.

Quite a number of the landscape paintings were painted in Lancaster County with the evident desire to produce typical scenes of our agricultural section: a view on the Susquehanna, several views on the Conestoga, an old stone bridge, hay-making scenes—groups of farm buildings. One crowning original landscape is an admirable presentation of a glorious sunset painted from the top of the artist's residence. It is all a glow with color, with the towers of Franklin and Marshall in the foreground, and painted in the manner of Turner. The coloring is convincing and one can imagine the delight with which the artist painted it. Deserving of special comment is a view of an old tree against the sky, reminding one of the Barbazon School. We are lead to believe that it was treasured by the artist for it is well framed and carefully glazed to protect it. It is really a portrait of an old tree along the Conestoga, and a convincing likeness because its old friends have immediately recognized it.

We may dismiss the copies in this collection, simply as "copies", although many of them were technically well executed.

There were four large religious subjects—one of same the Crucifixion, which we understand was at one time hung in the Grace Lutheran Church. It is the most impressive of the group and may have been an original com-

position. We are convinced that into this picture the artist threw much devout feeling and we know definitely that at midnight and the early hours of the morning he painted upon it. The others are doubtless copies, as are the Shakespearian subjects. There was one very charming copy of Magdalene by Guido Reni, full of pleasing tonal qualities and of marked Italian character.

With special interest we note four wall decorations which are more or less problematical—the largest one 12 ft. high and 3 ft. broad, probably a section out of the huge wall decoration, possibly after Raphael's cartoons. The subjects have a mingling of military and religious spirit, of the early christian epoch.

It is well known to the family that the artist had an ambition to portray some great religious event, and treated the matter in a more or less mysterious way, permitting no one to witness him working on same.

As we have noted Jacob William Deichler was of Teutonic origin and his forebearers of that type of staunch immigrants who came to help make up our community in the 18th century. There is no record from which to infer that any member of his family before or after him was interested in artistic pursuits.

It will be remembered that Jacob Eicholtz, Lancaster's most distinguished artist, was a smith, and so Deichler too we note was a craftsman.

Jacob Deichler married Catherine Kinsler, and they had a family of ten children, and notwithstanding same the artist seems to have had a studio no elsewhere than in his own home. He was enthusiastically devoted to his art throughout his life—the range of which was beyond the allotted years, having died on October 6th, 1921, at the age of 74. We note that he was nationally of the same origin as Eicholtz and Reingruber and had certain qualities of mind and character in common with them, distinctly Teutonic, such as great industry, persistency, and devotion to the work which he regards as his life work.

What place Jacob William Deichler of Lancaster will be assigned as an American artist is problematical, however, there is no doubt, that we, of Lancaster, find in his accomplished work, matter of considerable interest and find in his character much to be admired and emulated.

WALTER C. HAGER,
Lancaster, Pa.

February 9th, 1925.

The writer gratefully acknowledges receipt of data from Robert Deichler, Harry S. Deichler, Mr. and Mrs. Henry G. Sachs and Miss Clara Hartman.

W. C. H.

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