



# The Walker Painting



*The Battle of Lookout Mountain by James Walker*

The word “legacy” can carry different meanings for different people. To some, it can mean either an idea or physical object that is left behind by an individual or group. To others, it can be the actions of an individual or group that makes a lasting impression. James Walker’s painting, *The Battle of Lookout Mountain*, represents both of these ideals: it proves to be the legacy of not just the painter and the subject, but the legacy of all who have interacted with the painting over time.

On November 24, 1863, on the foggy slopes of Lookout Mountain, Union and Confederate soldiers fought for control of Chattanooga. At the mountain’s base, Walker, a well known painter of battle scenes, witnessed the engagement as it swirled above him. In the months following, he interviewed other battle eyewitnesses and produced detailed battlefield sketches and paintings as he began creating a visual record of the fight for Chattanooga. One work, depicting the Battle of Lookout Mountain, caught the eye of General Joseph Hooker, the Union commander during the battle. Seeking to perpetuate his own legacy at Lookout Mountain, Hooker commissioned Walker to produce a 13-by-30 foot oil painting with the general prominently featured in the foreground. Walker spent four years painting this masterpiece, finishing in 1874, for which Hooker paid \$20,000.

For Walker, the painting was the largest he ever completed. For Hooker, the painting placed him in the context of one of several battles that arguably turned the tide of the Civil War. After its completion, the painting began touring the country, visiting cities such as San Francisco, New York, and Philadelphia, all the while continuing the legacies of these two men. By 1898, Hooker's niece moved the painting to Watertown, New York. It was installed and displayed in Washington Hall's auditorium until the building's demolition in 1913. Then, the painting was rolled up and moved to storage for the next 44 years, with only a brief exhibition in 1927.



James Walker (seated at the easel) paints a landscape from his camp on the slope of Lookout Mountain.

*Photo courtesy of Chicago History Museum (ICHi-022087)*

In 1957, the painting was unrolled, examined, and donated to the National Park Service. After accepting the painting, the NPS discovered that between its size and its condition, significant funding was needed to provide it a proper home. It was not until 1985 when the NPS found a partner in Mr. Scott Probasco, a local Chattanooga, who offered to help fund raise for the painting's restoration. After raising over \$100,000 for conservation, shipping, and final installation, Probasco helped ensure the painting's legacy, as well as his own. Finally, in 1986, *The Battle of Lookout Mountain* was installed in the unfinished auditorium of the Lookout Mountain Battlefield Visitor Center, where its legacy continues.