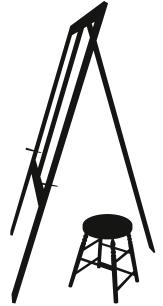


THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



Spring 2010 Newsletter

A NEW ORGANIZATION IS FORMED



Lisa Fox Martin
Board Chairman

A new chapter in the story has begun. On October 19th, 2009, the New York State Board of Regents approved a charter establishing an independent non-profit organization to own and operate the home of Thomas Cole. For the past ten years,

the historic site has been owned by the Greene County Historical Society, which owns several other important historic properties. Thomas Cole's home and studio will now be run as an independent non-profit organization.

Although the ownership structure is new, the people who are involved remain the same. The new organization's Board of Trustees consists of the same twelve people who were on the "Cole Committee" of the Greene County Historical Society, with the same officers including Lisa Fox Martin as Chairman. The three paid staff - Betsy Jacks, Joanna Frang, and Linda Bartula - have been retained by the Trustees to work for the new organization. A new part-time person, Melissa Gavilanes, was added this year.

With the new charter, the organization launched a new graphic identity that is at the top of this newsletter. The name, "Thomas Cole National Historic Site," was assigned to the site in 1999 by an act of the U.S. Congress when they made it an affiliate of the National Park Service. In addition, New York State has given the site the name "Thomas Cole Historic House," a designation that appears on the back. The graphic identity was designed as a pro-bono project by Abbott Miller of the world-renowned design firm, Pentagram, of New York and London. The words "Thomas Cole" are in a 19th century font that still appears fresh and vibrant today, and the color is the yellow of the Main House. The graphic motif is Thomas Cole's own unique easel that is now on view in his studio, rendered here in the historic style of silhouette.

Continued on page 3

2010 EXHIBITION BRINGS WOMEN ARTISTS TO LIGHT

May 2 - October 31

This May, join us for the opening of our new exhibition, "Remember the Ladies: Women of the Hudson River School," the first known exhibition to focus solely on the women artists associated with the 19th-century landscape painting movement.

The exhibition will include approximately 25 works of art by artists such as Julia Hart Beers, (sister to William and James Hart), Evelina Mount (niece to William Sidney Mount) Susie Barstow, Eliza Greatorex,

Harriet Cany Peale, and Josephine Walters among others. Also included are artworks by Thomas Cole's own sister Sarah Cole and daughter Emily Cole. The exhibition is co-curated by Nancy Siegel, Associate Professor of Art History at Towson University, Towson, MD and Jennifer Krieger, Managing Partner of Hawthorne Fine Art in Manhattan. The exhibition will be accompanied by a printed exhibition catalogue with full-color illustrations. The title of the exhibition is taken from a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams in 1776: "I desire you would Remember the Ladies... if particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion."



Harriet Cany Peale, *Kaaterskill Clove*, 1858.
oil on canvas, 36x25 in. Private collection

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR



Elizabeth Jacks
Executive Director

In our last newsletter I wrote to you as director of a different organization, the one that was operated by the Greene County Historical Society. As explained in the cover article of this newsletter, in November I joined the new board of the newly established "Thomas Cole Historic House". Here in my office I have the charter, complete

with the gold seal of the New York State Department of Education. We are all very excited! I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the trustees of the Greene County Historical Society for harboring us until we were ready to set sail.



Barbara Novak's talk. Photo by Susan Wides

I had the thrill of showing her Thomas Cole's home and studio, and she was as excited as a teenager to see the actual easels in the room where Cole painted his famous series "The Voyage of Life." Dr. Novak's talk later that afternoon presented a profound case for the importance of understanding our past and American cultural history in order to understand our own time.

I'm pleased to report that our attendance continues to climb. Ticket sales were up 32% over last year! We also increased our school group visits



dramatically due to our new school programs. All in all, we had over 450 students and teachers from local schools participating. Our new Programs Coordinator, Melissa Gavilanes, is overseeing this large and complex new program that has five specially-designed

"modules" for several different age levels. It has been a big change to see so many little people here, and we love it.

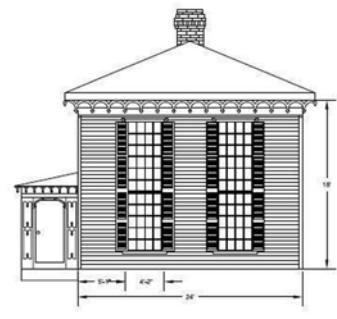


Archaeology reveals foundation stones.

As many of you know, Thomas Cole designed and had built an ornate new studio for himself here in 1846, but it was demolished in the 1970s. This magnificent building, however, has reappeared - well,

at least part of it has. The entire surface of the New Studio foundation has been excavated, and I had the pleasure of walking on the original stones last fall.

Until now it only existed on paper and in our imaginations. Quite suddenly, we can actually see it. The dimensions of the building are confirmed to be 24 x 42 feet, or 1008 square feet. With this information, the architect Marilyn Kaplan can complete her work to create the drawings and plans.



We have a lot of digging going on at the historic site. By spring we will (hopefully!) finish the parking lot with a large circle where a bus can enter and completely turn around. We will also be getting new



gravel paths all around the site, as well as outdoor lighting and hundreds of new trees. For an overview of the landscape plan, see the drawing on the back page of this newsletter.

Turning now to the interior spaces, I am excited to report that a great deal of new information has been found during the last twelve months. The Cole-era furnishings for the rooms in the Main House have been a mystery to us, as no interior photographs from Cole's time are known to exist. Fortunately, through a grant from the IMLS, we were able to hire historic



Carpet fragment on Cole's Chair

furnishings expert Jean Dunbar whose work has revealed many clues. Our "green room" was actually the Cole family dining room, our small gallery turns out to be the room in which Thomas Cole slept, and the room we thought was his bedroom was actually a Cole family parlour. Over the winter we acted on this new information, and a lot of furniture has been moved around. Ms. Dunbar's detective work has also revealed many new things to investigate, including what may be an actual fragment of the original carpeting that was in the West Parlour. It was upholstered onto Thomas Cole's chair! Her fascinating work will continue in 2010.



Board members and staff at the 2009 summer party

In the coming year I look forward to seeing all of our members and visitors back here for the opening day celebration of our 2010 exhibition of the women artists of the Hudson River School. Many thanks to you for supporting this wonderful place. □

NEW ORGANIZATION...

Continued from cover

The trustees and staff of Thomas Cole National Historic Site are grateful to the many people who worked to bring the site to this milestone, especially the Greene County Historical Society which has shepherded our growth. Only ten years ago, Thomas Cole's home - the birthplace of American landscape painting - stood in ruins. The graceful Federal-style 1815 Main House was shedding roof shingles with each gust of wind, and a pool of water filled the basement after pipes had frozen and burst. The spacious wrap-around porch was too dangerous to walk on as the rotted boards gave way underfoot. In 1998 when the Greene County Historian, Raymond Beecher, came to the site to consider what could be done, he almost "slammed the door shut and said 'forget it'", he later recalled. Fortunately for the thousands of people who now visit the site each year, he instead led the charge to save it. The site was acquired by the Greene County Historical Society and opened to the public in July 2001.

In the years that followed, the site experienced a meteoric rise. The first paid staff person was hired in 2003. Cole's "Old Studio" was restored and loan exhibitions of Hudson River School paintings began in 2004. A visitor center and gift shop, a lecture series, and a second staff person were added in 2005. Grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Humanities followed in 2006, bringing a new film about Thomas Cole for the visitor center and an extensive online education center. The site's operating budget doubled in four years, and attendance to the site grew ten fold. Two important cornerstones of financial stability materialized in 2009: a \$1 million endowment bequeathed by Raymond Beecher, and news from the National Park Service that the site would begin receiving operating support in 2010 and every year from now on.

Thomas Cole's home, meanwhile, is still a work in progress. This year, the large brick piers that once marked the entrance will be rebuilt, along with the stone wall topped by a picket fence that graced the street frontage in Cole's time. Apple orchards will be replanted all around the five-acre historic site, and a gravel path will lead visitors to the place where Cole's New Studio once stood. An architect is already hard at work on drawing up the plans to rebuild it. □



New Documentation on Thomas Cole

by Gerald L. Carr

Assisted by modern database technologies, a few months ago I retrieved the following posthumous tribute to Thomas Cole. Dated New York (i.e., Manhattan), February 15, 1848, the piece was authored by a correspondent signing himself (I assume the male gender) "H.F." "H.F." worked for *The Vermont Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper with a Judeo-Christian slant, founded in 1826 and published in Bellows Falls, Vermont. The editors printed "H.F.'s" "Letters from New York. No. III" on the second page of their issue for February 23, 1848.

By way of background, Thomas Cole's death on 11 February 1848 at Cedar Grove following a brief illness, shocked friends, colleagues, acquaintances and journalists. What we might call a phased public withdrawal (soon temporarily eclipsed by former President John Quincy Adams's death) ensued. Originating in New York State, printed and re-printed word of Cole's decease spread quickly from New England through at least the Carolinas and parts of the Mid-West, by April 1848 reaching the United Kingdom, where Cole was born in 1801 and had re-resided between mid-1829 and mid-1831. A retrospective exhibit of his paintings held at the American Art-Union in New York between late March and early May 1848, William Cullen Bryant's commemorative oration for Cole on May 4th, and Louis Legrand Noble's announced biography of Cole (Noble's monograph was published five years later, in 1853), generated new deliberations. Toward the end of 1848, the display and sale of Cole's allegorical series, *The Voyage of Life* (1840; Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, N.Y.), at the American Art-Union, prompted additional response and reverence.

"H.F."s own discussion of Cole was, properly, personal. While he had never met Cole, he had previously and, by his estimate, thoughtfully viewed the artist's paintings, and he happened to reside with a Manhattan family, unnamed, who had known the artist intimately. Their memories and emotions fueled his eulogy. We should not wonder at the writer's palpable sentimentality or his emphases on Cole's Christianity and (to use today's parlance) people skills. Published remembrances of Cole echoed and re-echoed one another in those respects. To make the point I have chosen a further three, at least two of them reprinted elsewhere after their initial publica-

tions, for excerpt here. The editors of the *Daily Albany Argus* newspaper (February 15, 1848) remembered Cole thusly:

. . . [He] may be said to have stood at the head of his profession. In Landscape Painting, he had no superior, if any equal, in America. . . . But if he was great as an artist, he was truly beloved as a man. In the village in which he lived, and, which exhibits, in all directions, the touches of his refining taste, clear intellect, and classic mind; the church, of which he was a devoted member, and the interests of which he delighted to advance; and above all, the family and immediate friends, by whom he was a cherished object of regard and affection; his death is deplored, by all classes, (as a letter justly says), as if they had all lost a common friend and brother!

Writing a few days later (February 19, 1848), managers of *The Harbinger*, a Manhattan Associationist--utopian-oriented--weekly, said this:

. . . As a man, Mr. Cole was universally esteemed. His retiring habits, the perfect absence of pretension, extensive reading, noble sentiments, and fine religious sensibilities endeared him to all who knew him. There was a feminine beauty in his character which made him as loveable in his deportment as he was admirable for his talents. A quiet but genial enthusiasm pervaded his talk, and he was utterly free from those petty jealousies which so frequently mar the intercourse of the irritable race. His studio and his home, beautifully situated within the evening shadows of the Catskills, were delightful places of resort to all who were alive either to genius or worth. It was, however, when ranging the spurs and cones of those noble and profound mountains with him for a companion, that you most deeply felt the loveliness and grandeur of his spirit. The days so passed could never be forgotten. Thence Cole drew his rarest inspirations, and now that he is gone we can only think of his spirit as hovering over the scenes in which he loved to dwell.

Two days later still, signing himself "S.H.", a Catskill, N.Y., correspondent of the *New York Daily Tribune* (February 21, 1848) waxed nostalgic:

. . . His matchless pencil and pallet are now laid aside forever, and his mortal remains shall but too shortly moulder in the dust. Not so with his memory. So long as the creations of his immortal mind shall exist upon the canvas, so long as taste and genius shall continue to be cherished, the name of COLE will be spoken with sentiments of admiration and pride, mingled with deep regret for his early decease. His death was in every way worthy of his fame, and is a beautiful exemplification of his last

series of pictures. He had long since chosen the Cross for his guide, and it has doubtless led him to the enjoyment of that land where there is no more pain, and where he will abundantly realize all those glorious visions which his undying fancy has so beautifully foreshadowed as the reward for him who shall seek the Cross and be directed and supported by it.

Apropos "H.F.", he was new at his job, having begun corresponding from New York for *The Vermont Chronicle* in early February 1848. Acquainted with the fine arts, he voiced issues felt by Americans of his epoch. His inaugural letter to the *Chronicle* dealt, or attempted to deal, with Hiram Powers's controversial statue, *The Greek Slave*. His next missive ruminated a local temperance meeting that he had attended. His third discourse was the present one, on Thomas Cole. Immediately below it, *Vermont Chronicle* proprietors reprinted a poignant eulogy of Cole "communicated" by Thomas Addison Richards (1820-1900) on behalf of the New York Sketch Club, of which organization Cole had been an honorary member. A week and a half later, on March 4, 1848, *The Christian Register*, a Boston weekly, republished "H.F."s "Letters from New York. No. III" in its entirety.

The Vermont Chronicle, Bellows Falls, VT. February 23, 1848, p30.Letters from New York, No. III, February 15th, 1848:

As I was coming down to dinner to day, I met a member of the family with whom I have found a delightful home in this "wicked city," and observed that she was weeping. Just at that moment her father came in. She looked up into his face and touchingly said, "Father, Mr. Cole is dead." "What, my daughter?" "Mr. Cole is dead." "Mr. Cole? Thomas Cole?" "Yes, father." "Thomas Cole dead?" and the old man with his white locks turned away to bear the first stroke of sorrow alone. This intelligence startled me. I thought—Can it be Cole the painter? and I hurried on to inquire. "Yes, it is Cole the painter." It was true; the great, good man, the artist, the friend, had died. The telegraph had just brought them the news. I found upon inquiry that for twenty years they had known him, and that he had been on the most intimate terms with the family.

On his first arrival in the city when a young man, they had found him out,—and as month after month they knew him better, he had gained upon their hearts till he had won them all. He had been their chosen, choicest friend,—their kindest, most sympathizing brother. And as he grew up, and honors came rolling in upon him, as the rich and distinguished courted his society, he had ever

remained steadfast to his early friends. His noble heart threw off the darts of temptation that fame and wealth cast from their full quivers, like burnished steel. Simple and truthful he remained until the last hour.

I had only known him as Cole, the artist; never as Cole, the friend. I had looked upon his paintings, and studied and thought over them by the hour. I had felt my spirit stirred to better things by their contemplation; but only through his works had I known the man. Now I could know of him from those who had watched and known his whole progress—and though the story was told in tears, yet it lost none of its deep interest. They spoke of him as being so pure, so elevated in all his views, as possessed of such a warm heart, and such a beautiful Christian character!

His conversation was of the most interesting kind. He was naturally social, and cordial in his feelings; his travels had furnished him with the means of extensive and varied acquisition, and he was ever generously communicative. He illustrated his conversation by amusing stories and incidents in his own experience—and gave a life and glow to all he had to say. In person he was rather tall and slender. His hair was thin.

He had received a great deal of money, by his paintings. But in ways of benevolence; in the encouragement of the fine arts, and of young artists; in kind doings to his friends; in valuable acquisitions, he had invariably expended all his income. He had been married eleven years, and has left a son, his first born, at an age when he most needed the moulding influence of a father, and of such a father! Of this son, he had high hopes as a painter. When the boy was quite young he gave him a piece of canvass and brushes and told him to paint something, "just what he pleased." After a while the lad came with the picture of a man kneeling in adoration, and many stars above him.—"Well, Theodore, what have you here? What do these stars mean?" said Mr. Cole. "Why, Father," the boy replied, "it is the first man who saw the stars!" A conception worthy of the son of such a sire.

Of late years he had resided in Catskill. He could not live in the city, because his valuable time was used up by the many people who came to see him. He was a man of untiring industry; and doubtless his severe labors of this winter have been connected with his last sickness. I asked his friend when she last saw him. "Oh," she replied, "that last visit, I shall never forget it! It was in the summer. I was with friends not far from Catskill. I was invited to spend the following day with him. On the morning before, riding on horseback, and riding on and on, I finally found myself so near his house that I thought

it best to continue on my way, rather than return. As I drew near the house, he spied me from the room where he was painting, and went and told his sister, 'There is Miss B. coming.' They all ran out to meet me,--he without his hat; and gave me such a cordial greeting, I stayed till the next morning. It was raining then, and when he came down to breakfast, as he met me with his pleasant good morning, said, 'Miss B. I am glad it rains to-day; friends never go away when it rains.' He had his easel brought down into the back parlor, and there he worked all day, and we were in and out, chatting with him so delightfully. At the tea table he said, 'I fear I have an engagement out to-night; but if I have I'll forget it and stay with you, and we will have a quiet good talk. People don't expect company when it rains.' So he sat down with us in the evening. His conversation was beautiful. We were speaking of an acquaintance who is an infidel.—I expressed my astonishment, and he responded heartily, saying, 'When I go forth on these mountains and look on this beautiful world, I see God in every thing. I don't understand how a man can be a true artist without being a good man, a religious man.'

He brought out a large pile of landscape sketches he had made in his travels, and which he intended to paint. We looked them over together, and he explained them all so kindly and interestingly! We sat and talked till one o'clock, and then he sat down and prayed. It was the last time I ever saw him."

Yes, the noble genius has gone to his eternal rest. In Heaven will his sanctified spirit find unending bliss, drink in the full joys of holiness and love, and be ravished by celestial visions. There will he, as on earth, "see God in everything," and with an eye unveiled by sense, unob-

scured by imperfection.

I send you the following notice of his doings of the Sketch Club, as worthy testimonial to his merits. Interesting notices of him are constantly coming out in the papers. All know of his "Voyage of Life," and his choice landscape paintings. The most valuable painting in the Art Union Exhibition, the last year, was by Cole. It was styled in the Catalogue "Home in the Woods," and beneath the name was this verse:

"And minds have there been nurtured, whose control
Is felt even in their nation's destiny;
Men who swayed senates with a statesman's nod,
And looked on armies with a leader's eye."

How inestimable now are his productions! His sun has gone down at noon, but it has risen in a brighter, an eternal day!

H.F.

Gerald L. Carr is an art and architectural historian and head of the Frederic E. Church Catalogue Raisonné Project. He earned his BA at Michigan State University in 1964 and his PhD at the University of Michigan in 1976. He has held teaching positions at the University of Michigan, the University of Cincinnati and Southern Methodist University. Dr. Carr is the author of several books including *Frederic Edwin Church: The Icebergs; The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845-1854* (with Franklin Kelly); and *Olana Landscapes*. ▲

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 1 4-6 pm



Members' Preview and Reception for the new exhibition,
"Remember the Ladies: Women of the Hudson River School"

Sunday, May 2 12-1:30 pm

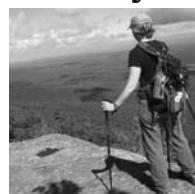
Free Viewing of "Remember the Ladies" exhibition

2 pm

Lecture by co-curators:

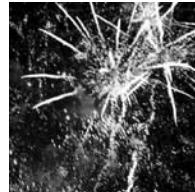
Nancy Siegel, Associate Professor, Towson University
Jennifer Krieger, Managing Partner, Hawthorne Fine Art

Saturday, June 5 9 am



National Trails Day Hike on the Hudson River School Art Trail

Sunday, July 4



Summer Party

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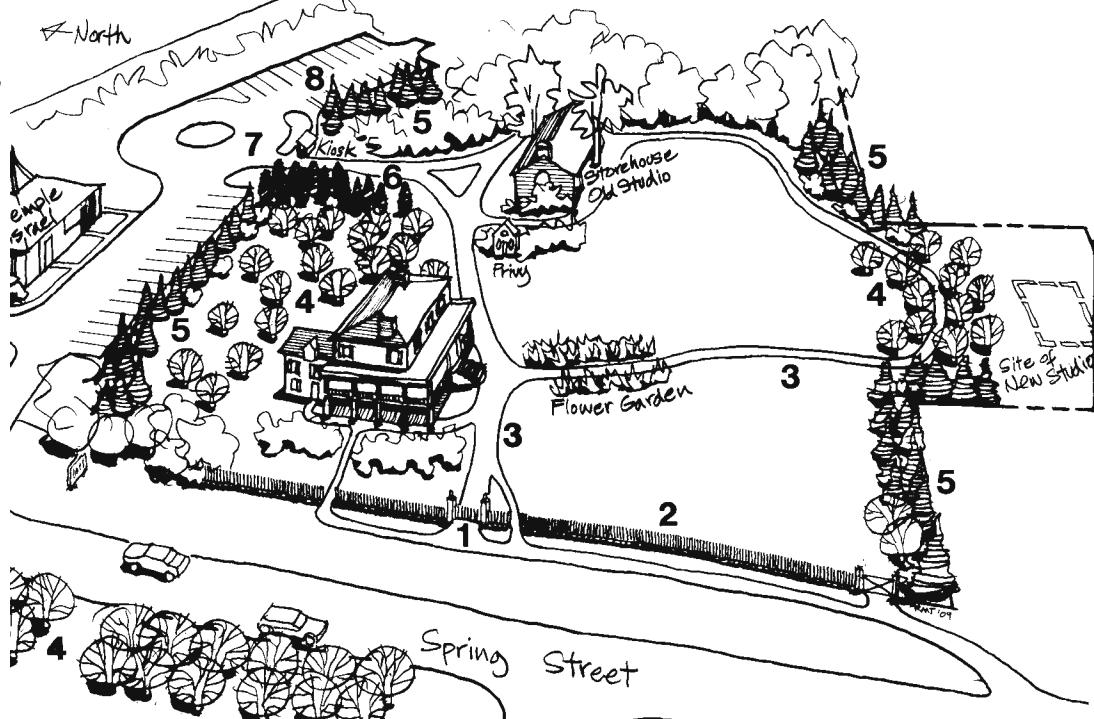
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LANDSCAPE RESTORATION UNDER WAY

Over the winter and continuing in the spring, dramatic changes are taking place at Cedar Grove, bringing it back to the way it looked when Thomas Cole walked these paths, and also upgrading the campus to accommodate the growing numbers of visitors. The street frontage will be greatly enhanced by a welcoming entrance gate, stone wall and piers that were part of the original Federal landscape architecture. Orchard trees will flower in the spring, and evergreens will hide any neighboring modern elements. Come and see the progress this spring!



1. Restored Entrance Gate and Piers
2. Restored Wall & Picket Fence
3. Restored Carriage Drives and Paths
4. Orchard Plantings

5. Boundary Screen Plantings
6. Restored Cedar Grove
7. New Arrival Circle
8. New Parking