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In the nineteenth century the White Mountains of New Hampshire became the premier region for American artists painting in the Hudson River school tradition. Over 400 artists painted in the White Mountains. These artists, along with writers, railroad developers, and hotel owners of the area, participated in a symbiotic relationship that enabled art and tourism to grow and flourish in mid-nineteenth century America.

Although hearty settlers provided the first taverns and lodging for tourists arriving in the early 1800s, and the expansion of railroads into the region made the White Mountains accessible to the major metropolitan areas of the Northeast, it was the writers and artists who played an instru-

mental role in raising awareness of the region as a tourist destination. The developing national economy, the growth of the cities of the Northeast, and the exposure to literature and art were factors in the populace developing a “taste” for the landscape.

The Benjamin Willey family moved to Crawford Notch in the White Mountains in 1825 and opened their home as an inn at the base of what would later be named Mount Willey. On August 28, 1826, a thunderstorm continued for hours and created landslides down the mountain. Sensing their home was in danger, Benjamin Willey, his wife, five children and the farm laborers fled onto the mountain slopes, where they were found days later, buried beneath earth and stone. Miraculously, their home was spared by a large boulder behind their house that diverted the slide.

This natural disaster seemed to stir the

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imagination of the American people like no other. According to historian Eric Purchase, “Throughout the nineteenth century, depictions of the event appeared in various forms: literature, paintings, drawings and engravings, travel writing, memoirs, local histories, newspapers, and scientific journals.”¹ With writers and





All illustrations are from private collections unless otherwise noted.

ABOVE: Charles Wilson Knapp, *Mount Washington in Autumn*, o/c, 20 x 36.

RIGHT: George Albert Frost, *Franconia Notch*, 1883, o/c, 28 x 48.

LEFT: William Henry Hilliard, *Mount Washington*, 1876, o/c, 16 x 26.

artists helping to popularize the tragedy, tourists headed for Crawford Notch to gaze with wonder at the Willey House that remained untouched while an entire family perished. Thomas Hill's (1829-1908) painting *Crawford Notch* dramatically depicts the site, with the Willey home standing in the mid-ground, situated at the base of Mount Willey before the slide.

Numerous guidebooks described scenic vistas in the region, and the Reverend Thomas Starr King's *The White Hills, Their Legends, Landscapes, and Poetry* was considered the best of its time.² Published in 1859, it contained detailed descriptions of the scenery and featured sixty illustrations. Many of those scenes are featured in the *Consuming Views* exhibition. Replete with poetry and literary references, Starr King described the scenes with an artist's perspective, indicating the best times of day for viewing, and included a discourse on the best lighting conditions. He wrote, "But let



them study the Notch mountains of Franconia from the school-house in Campton, by the morning or evening light. They differ then from their ordinary aspects as much as rubies and sapphires from pebbles."³

The tourists whom Starr King addressed in his guidebook were people of means. According to historian Dona Brown, "Starr King was preoccupied with the development of taste, gentility, and a refined religious sensibility among those with sufficient leisure to support those characteristics; his projected audience was affluent, educated, and aspiring."⁴ He en-

thusiastically encouraged readers to patronize White Mountain artists of the day, writing, "The effect of White Mountain journeys should be seen in our homes, in a purer delight in art, and an intelligent patronage of it."⁵

Early visitors to the White Mountains came by road through Crawford Notch. They were primarily explorers, drawn to the beauty and natural curiosities of the region. By the 1820s, these pioneers were joined by another class—tourists—seeking pleasure and recreation. But it was not until rail travel began in 1851 that the White



LEFT: Frank Henry Shapleigh, *The Crawford Notch*, 1881, o/c, 38 x 60.

BELOW LEFT: Samuel Lancaster Gerry, *Old Man of the Mountains Near Profile House, White Mtns.*, 1886, o/c, 61 x 48, Sullivan Museum and History Center of Norwich University.

RIGHT: Alfred Thompson Bricher, *Echo Lake and Mount Lafayette*, 1869, o/c, 20 x 40.

BELOW RIGHT: Benjamin Champney, *Carter Notch from the Wildcat River*, 1854, o/c, 24 x 34, John J. and Joan R. Henderson.



Mountains became accessible to the masses.

An 1853 guidebook published by the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Rail Road promoted its modern rail travel in genteel and appealing terms for tourists. "Instead of being jammed as formerly into a contracted vehicle capable of accommodating but a half of the people forced into it...with jaded and panting horses—sweltering with heat or almost smothered with dust, the traveler...can now jump into a spacious and well ventilated rail road car, elegant in its appointments as a parlor...."⁶

Writing in the American art journal, *The Crayon*, in 1857, artist Samuel Lancaster Gerry (1813-1891) describes his rail travel experience along the eastern route from Portland, Maine, "One can always find glimpses of the picturesque in travel...from Bethel, through Gilead and Shelburne, there is much beauty and something of grandeur. The Androscoggin, at Bethel and Gilead, is a fine river, and, in its winding, shows many passages of great picturesqueness, especially at Bethel, where the combination of river, meadow and mountains, furnishes material worthy the study of artist and amateur."⁷

New Hampshire's White Mountains tourist industry burgeoned in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Eric Purchase, "Starting in 1851, the White Mountains became the destination for growing thousands of well-heeled vacationers, and these tourists had the wealth and taste to appreciate good landscape paintings, too."⁸ Eventually, grand hotels were established and thrived, providing lodging for mountain visitors.

During this time, art and tourism flourished in a cooperative atmosphere, with both artists and tourists benefiting from their association. Many artists became "artists-in-residence" at the grand hotels,



which provided advantages for both the artist and the hotel. The hotel benefited with another “attraction” to bring guests for an extended stay. The artists had “consumers” to purchase their works. By providing tourists with “souvenir” views which could be taken home and shown to others, the artists helped to “market” the region, attracting even more tourists to the White Mountains. Returning to their winter studios, many artists also painted larger exhibition landscapes which also promoted the area to wealthy art patrons in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Edward Hill (1843-1923) was an artist-in-residence at the Profile House from 1877 to 1892. This hotel was located on Profile Lake at the foot of Cannon Mountain, only a short walk from other attractions in Franconia Notch: Eagle Cliff, Echo Lake, and Mount Lafayette. Hill painted a dramatic view within the notch titled *Echo Lake and Profile House*.

Although Samuel Lancaster Gerry (1813-1891) wasn't an artist-in-residence, he painted throughout the White Mountains. Like Hill, he was also very partial to the Franconia region. Gerry's major work, *Old Man in the Mountains* serves as a compelling tourist invitation, depicting a majestic view of the Old Man overlooking the Profile House boathouse with tourists strolling, picnicking, fishing and boating on Profile Lake.



Frank Henry Shapleigh was artist-in-residence at the Crawford House from 1877 to 1893. According to historian, David Tatham, “There he painted, sold his works, entertained a never-ending stream of visitors, and was affability itself.... Those who bought his work at the Crawford House purchased a souvenir of the man as well as the mountains.”⁹ Shapleigh painted the view from his studio at the Crawford House, *The Crawford Notch*, many times. This painting shows guests of the Crawford House strolling and boating on Saco

Lake, and the stagecoach arriving at the railroad station to chauffeur tourists on to other hotels. The railroad station and Shapleigh's studio still stand today.

Although the railroads brought early tourists to the northern end of the White Mountains' Presidential Range in Gorham, it was the town of North Conway further south that became the most popular gathering spot for artists during the 1850s. North Conway's popularity with both artists and tourists was largely the result of the entrepreneurship of one man – Samuel



ABOVE: Thomas Hill, *Mount Lafayette in Winter*, 1870, o/c, 36 x 60, John J. and Joan R. Henderson.

LEFT: Samuel Lancaster Gerry, *Mount Washington from the Saco Ford*, 1858, o/c, 20 x 30.

ABOVE RIGHT: Edmund Darch Lewis, *Mount Washington and the Saco River*, 1870, o/c, 30 x 50.

RIGHT: Erdix Tenney Wilson, *Mount Kearsarge*, o/c, 18 x 28.

River by Edmund Darch Lewis (1835-1910), and *Mount Washington in Autumn* by Charles Wilson Knapp (1823-1900) show the broad mountain views across the region's bucolic intervale.

Benjamin Champney has often been referred to as the father of White Mountain landscape painting. Although he was not associated with a hotel, Champney maintained a summer home and studio in North Conway for more than fifty years where he welcomed many fellow artists and myriad tourists. Champney remembered, "My studio has been the resort of many highly cultivated people from all parts of our country and even from foreign lands, and I have enjoyed much and learned much from the interchange of ideas with refined and

Thompson. In the 1830s, he established one of the area's first inns. Although the coach route from Conway to Crawford Notch bypassed North Conway, Thompson established his own coach route through North Conway and on to the Glen House in Pinkham Notch. Most importantly, however, he persuaded Benjamin Champney (1817-1907) and John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872) to come to North

Conway and produce paintings that were used to promote the picturesque nature of the region, which some called the "Switzerland of America."

A view of North Conway with Thompson's Tavern, circa 1865, is depicted in *Mount Washington and the Village of North Conway*, painted by Bradford Freeman (1839-1875). Other North Conway-area scenes, like *Mount Washington and the Saco*



intelligent minds. But I can relate a little incident of quite another kind. A party had been bustling around the studio making loud remarks about the paintings. At last they caught sight of me in my adjoining workroom and cried out: 'Now let's go and see him perform!' This I thought a good joke and allowed them to come in."¹⁰

Like many artists of the day, Champney knew Starr King whom he praised in his memoir, *Sixty Years of Art and Artists*, published in 1900. He notes,

Starr King was an enthusiastic admirer of the White Mountain region, and his eloquent pen described with great power his impressions. These brilliant descriptions he embodied afterwards in a book for the benefit of visitors and tourists.... In the winter of 1857 I painted a sunset, getting most of my facts from the studio windows. Starr King saw it later in Boston, and was so pleased with it that his parishioners purchased it for him.¹¹

Champney had a wide circle of artist friends who visited and stayed in the vicinity to paint. The village of Jackson, which lies eight miles north of North Conway, became another favorite gathering spot for these artists. Samuel Colman (1832-1920)



established a summer studio there and attracted Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832-1928) to the region. Shattuck returned to Jackson every summer from 1854 to 1864, and married Colman's sister in 1860. Many artists found Jackson an idyllic community in which to paint and sketch during the summer months, including Shapleigh, who built a house in Jackson in 1896.

North Conway's popularity with

tourists actually led some artists to abandon the region for the tranquility of Franconia Notch and the quieter towns of Woodstock and West Campton. A letter to the editor in the October 1856 issue of *The Crayon* argued that the virtues of Conway were overrated "while not one poor syllable is breathed of Campton."

...I think I shall at once 'fetch' your unqualified admiration over to this



ABOVE: Thomas Hill, *Crawford Notch*, 1872, o/c, 72 x 124, New Hampshire Historical Society.

LEFT: John William Casilear, *Mount Chocorua*, 1867, o/c, 11 1/2 x 18.

ABOVE RIGHT: Edward Hill, *Franconia Notch, White Mts.—Echo Lake and Profile House*, 1887, o/c, 38 x 62, New Hampshire Historical Society, gift of Mabelle Furst Greenleaf in memory of Charles Henry Greenleaf and Edith Greenleaf.

RIGHT: Franklin Stanwood, *Mount Lafayette*, 1886, o/c, 34 x 54, John J. and Joan R. Henderson.



Echo Lake in Franconia Notch. His largest known version, *Echo Lake and Mt. Lafayette*, shows Eagle Cliff and Mt. Lafayette on a calm morning.

western side of the White Hills, by the mere mention of the single, simple fact, that our little inn...has all season through been filled to overflowing by artists, with no grief but that double-barreled sorrow that they did not come earlier, and that an approaching autumn will not let them stay longer.... In the evenings, which are now growing cool, we assemble in gay gossip about the hearth of our bar-room...being a temperance establishment, prohibitory of all fluids, ex-

cepting only 'hard cider,' of which our host supplies an aqueduct at dinner time. I am very sure they have no such cider at Conway!¹²

The highly detailed painting *Franconia Notch* by George Albert Frost (1843-1907) features a panoramic view looking north through the notch from North Woodstock, highlighted by genre elements of tourists leisurely catching swallowtail butterflies or fishing by the river. Alfred T. Bricher (1837-1908) painted numerous views of

Although a rail trip to Gorham on the northeastern edge of New Hampshire's White Mountain region was often followed by a coach ride to the Glen House in Pinkham Notch, there were other coach routes that provided commanding views of the Northern Presidential range. From east to west, routes stretched through the communities of Gorham, Randolph, Jefferson, and Lancaster. Horace Wolcott Robbins' (1842-1904) painting, *Mounts Madison and Adams*, depicts a Concord Coach en-



Mountains continue to draw visitors by the thousands. However, the era of grand hotels with artists-in-residence, and the thriving communities of artists at North Conway, Jackson, and West Campton has long past. Although some of the landscapes painted in the 1800s strikingly resemble the actual scenes today, many views are no longer visible due to development and reforestation. Thankfully, the major paintings

that remain, by well known Hudson River school artists such as Jasper Cropsey (1823-1900), David Johnson (1827-1908), and John Frederick Kensett (1823-1872), and paintings by many lesser-known—but equally capable—artists such as those depicted in the *Consuming Views* exhibition, are wonderful historical remembrances for future generations to enjoy.

¹ Eric Purchase, *Out of Nowhere: Disaster and*

ABOVE: George W. Waters, *Eagle Cliff from Profile Lake*, 1877, o/c, 26 x 44 1/2.

LEFT: Bradford Freeman, *Mount Washington and the Village of North Conway*, o/c, 24 x 36, John J. and Joan R. Henderson.

ABOVE RIGHT: Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Mount Washington from Lake Sebago*, 1867, o/c, 20 x 32.

RIGHT: Horace Wolcott Robbins, Jr., *Mounts Madison and Adams*, probably 1863-65, o/c, 30 x 54.

Tourism in the White Mountains (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 1.

² Making of America, a digital library of primary sources in American social history. *The White Hills* on-line in its entirety: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=AJA1997>.

³ Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape, and Poetry* (Boston: Isaac N. Andrews, 1859), p. 95.

⁴ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England, Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), p. 80.

⁵ Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape, and Poetry*, p. 72.

⁶ S. B. Beckett, *Guide Book of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Rail Roads* (Portland: Sanborn



& Carter and H. J. Little & Co, 1853), p. 2.

⁷ *The Crayon 4* (1857), 350-351 Letter Woodstock, N.H., September, 1857.

⁸ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, p. 94.

⁹ *Full of Facts and Sentiment: The Art of*

Frank H. Shapleigh, A Loan Exhibition, October 15-November 28, 1982 (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1982), p. 14.

¹⁰ Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, MA: Wallace and

Andrews, 1900), p. 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

¹² *The Crayon 3* (1856), pp. 317-318.

¹³ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, p. 100.