



1. JACOB EICHHOLTZ (Self-Portrait)—*Dr. John Eichholtz, owner*

## JACOB EICHHOLTZ

Introduction by EDGAR P. RICHARDSON  
*Director, Detroit Institute of Arts*

*Jacob Eichholtz is a problem which we must look to people in Pennsylvania to solve. His career and his works are there; and his life is part of the story of the arts in that state.*

*A study of the early American portrait painters has followed a fairly regular pattern. The artists like Stuart or Copley, who painted important historical portraits, challenged curiosity first. Then the other portrait painters around them in Boston, in New York and Philadelphia, have attracted the interest of scholars. Only after the artists of the great cities on tidewater had been studied was attention drawn to the other artists of the back country, the artists of the Connecticut River Valley and the hill country of Connecticut, of Albany and Buffalo. The painters of the New England back country—Ralph Earl, Richard and William Jennys, Reuben Moulthrop, Winthrop Chandler—have begun to receive their due. Excellent exhibits have been held and an attempt has been made to clarify their careers and their production. A full-length study has now been devoted to Ezra Ames of Albany. In contrast to these, Jacob Eichholtz, who represents the art of the piedmont in the middle states, remains an unsolved question. What is the story of his life? What were his works? Where does he fit in the story of American painting? We have as yet no answers. Yet he is at least as important as any of these artists.*

*Eichholtz is interesting for another reason also. In the early days of our society, before there was an organized artistic life, young Americans were drawn to the art of painting in two ways. Some, like Benjamin West or John Trumbull, were inspired by the dream of art as it drifted across the Atlantic Ocean in books or in that vague, mysterious medium of men's memories, of whose workings we often know so little. Almost before he had seen a living artist, Benjamin West's head was filled with dreams of Athens or Florence, of royal patrons and of the honors received by the great artists of the past. The second approach was a very different one.*



2. CAPTURE OF ANDRÉ (painted at age 12)—*Louise C. Estill*

3. LANDSCAPE WITH LAKE—*Louise C. Estill*



*It was that of the craftsman, who, while practicing his manual skill, discovered within himself a delight in colors, a hunger for the painted image, which led him to abandon his skilled trade and take up the art of painting. This type of artist, too, has a very ancient and notable ancestry. When Charles Willson Peale changed from making saddles and repairing clocks, or Jacob Eichholtz from tinsmithing, to painting portraits, they were following the example of many of the great artists of Florence who, as Vassari tells us, began as goldsmiths or some other kind of skilled craftsmen. The craftsman-artist is an attractive type to me. Disciplined and sensitive, he is also usually modest and independent, making few claims upon society other than asking it to give him a chance to do his work. By his very modesty as a human being he often fails to challenge the curiosity of the historian; although his work may deserve study by reason of its artistic qualities.*

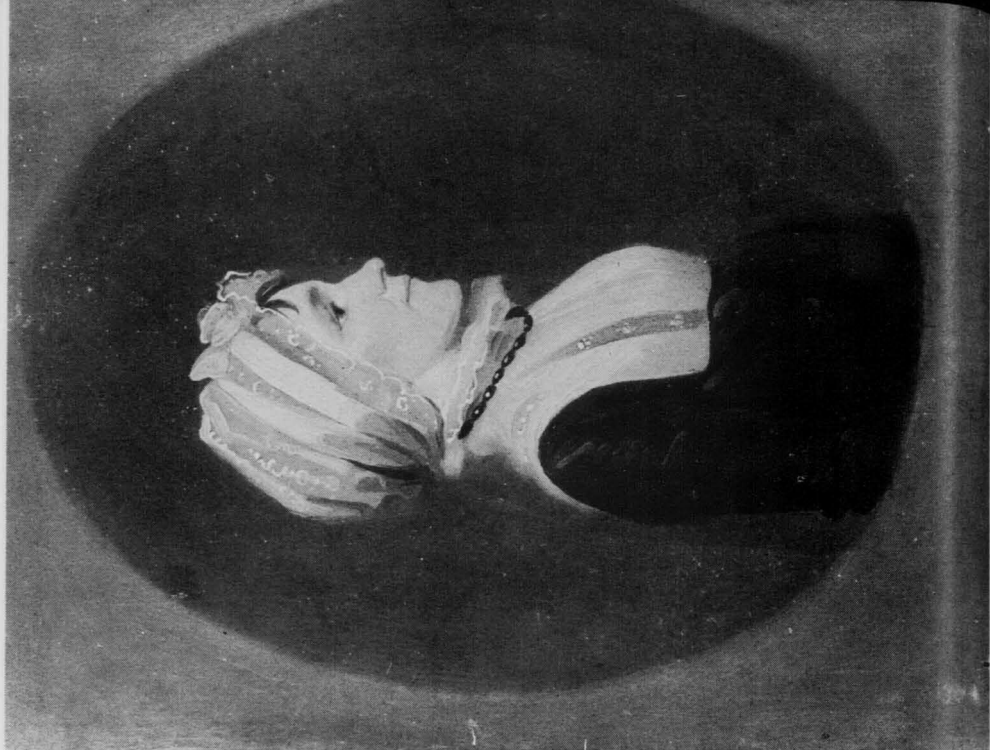
*Eichholtz was a simple, direct painter and apparently a rather uncomplicated personality. But he was an artist of a simple and relatively uncomplicated society. His achievement as a painter and his place in that society are not, for that reason, less worthy of attention.*

EPR

BY EARLE NEWTON\*

AMERICAN art began as a colonial appendage of the mother country, like politics and other aspects of culture, projected across the seas to new and distant shores. The first painters—John Smibert, Joseph Blackburn, John Wollaston—came to the colonies to try their hands at casting colonial likenesses; some stayed, others returned. A very few—though possibly more than we now know—were native-born, like Nathaniel Emmons, and never left. But the best-known native painters turned their eyes to the mother country. Benjamin West was the first to go; after him Charles Willson Peale, John Singleton Copley, Gilbert Stuart, Matthew Pratt, and John Trumbull went to study under the Pennsylvanian who had established himself in London so successfully as to become the

\*Mr. Newton is the Director, Bureau of Museums, Historic Sites and Properties, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. He has been Director, Institute on Historical and Archival Management; Director, Old Sturbridge Village; Director, Vermont Historical Society; and Editor of *American Heritage*, *Vermont History*, and *Vermont Life*. He is the author of *Before Pearl Harbor* and *The Vermont Story . . . 1749-1949*.



second President of the Royal Academy, succeeding the great Sir Joshua Reynolds. A few, including Trumbull, Peale, and Stuart came back.

It was Gilbert Stuart who dominated American art from his return in 1792 to his death in 1828. Many an aspiring painter sought his advice and instruction. One of these was an obscure Lancaster coppersmith named Eichholtz—Jacob Eichholtz. But Stuart was not the first accomplished painter that Eichholtz had met. In Philadelphia Thomas Sully, much influenced by the English manner (and especially that of the famous court painter, Sir Thomas Lawrence), had established a good reputation for finished portraiture. In 1809 it happened that this well-established artist received a Lancaster commission. He later reported on his experience:

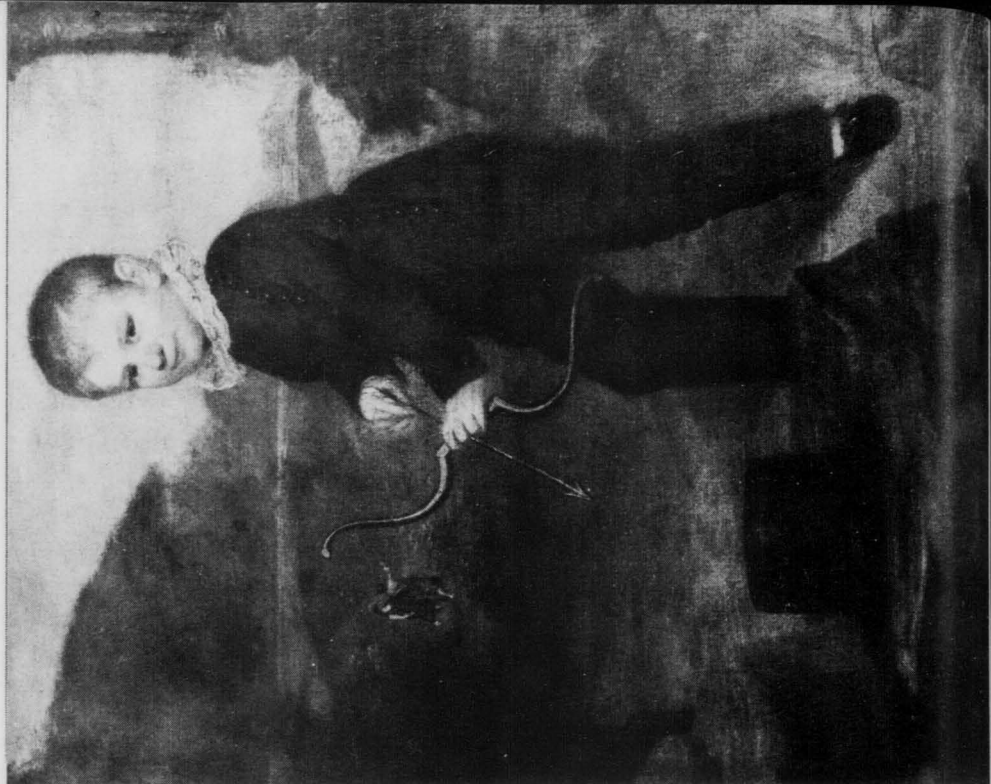
“When Governor Snyder was elected, I was employed by Mr. Binns to go to Lancaster, and paint a portrait of the new Chief Magistrate of the state. Eichholtz was then employing all his leisure hours, stolen from the manufacturing of copper pans, in painting. He kindly offered me the use of his painting room, which I gladly accepted, and gave him during my stay in Lancaster, all the information I could impart. When I saw his portraits a few years afterwards (in the interim he had visited and copied Stuart), I was much surprised and gratified. I have no doubt that Eichholtz would have made a first-rate painter had he begun early in life, with the usual advantages.”<sup>1</sup>

Sully’s gratification has a strongly patronizing note. Perhaps by 1840 he would have commented differently, for Eichholtz’s style by then had come so close to Sully’s that his late works have often been attributed to the “master.” (Note the portraits of Richard Maris, Jr. [1832], and Julia Nicklin [1837].)

Eichholtz’s own narrative, supplied to the painter-biographer William Dunlap for his encyclopedic compendium in 1834, exhibits an unabashed but appealing naiveté. Almost all the basic information we have on the painter comes from it.

“I was born in the town of Lancaster, Pennsylvania in the year 1776—an eventful year it was to Americans—and I often bless my stars that I was born sometime after the declaration of inde-

<sup>1</sup> Dunlap, William, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*. Boston, Goodspeed, 1918, 386.



pendence, not wishing to have been a British subject. This smacks of democracy you will say, but so it is; I cannot help it; I took in the fresh air of independence. But I digress—

“My parents were both descendants of Germans and reared a large family of children. I must digress again, and state that my father, and three brothers, all carried arms in our struggle for independence.

“My parents being in moderate circumstances could ill afford to give their children more than a plain English education. The first impulse I remember to have felt for drawing, was when a child, not more than seven years of age, generally confining myself in the garret, when I should have been at school, to delineating objects that struck my fancy, on the wall with red chalk. My father, not knowing the full value of the arts, felt little inclined to foster my rude efforts.

“’Tis true, a common sign painter was at length called in to give me the first rudiments of drawing. This painter being a man of strong passions, in a fit of unrequited love, committed suicide by shooting himself. I shall never forget the pang I felt on first hearing of the destruction of my teacher. I considered myself forever cut off from my favorite pursuit. The instruction I received from him was little better than nothing, yet the seeds were sown. At the proper time I was put apprentice to a copper-smith (a wretched contrast with a picture maker) when still my predilection for drawing showed itself on the walls of the shop with a charcoal.

“After the expiration of my apprenticeship I commenced the copper-smith business on my own account, with pretty good luck, still the more agreeable love of painting continually haunted me. Chance, about this time threw a painter into the town of my residence. This in a moment decided my fate as to the arts. Previous to the arrival of this painter, I had made some rude efforts with tolerable success, having nothing more than a bootjack for a palette, and anything in the shape of a brush, for at that time brushes were not to be had not even in Philadelphia. At length I was fortunate enough to get a few half worn brushes from Mr. Sully, being on the eve of his departure for England [1809]. This was a feast to me, and enabled me to go on until others were to be had.

“About this time I had a family with three or four children, and yet had not the courage to relinquish the copper-smith and become





THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS  
CHICAGO, ILL. 60637  
U.S.A.



a painter. To support my family as a painter was out of the question. I divided my attention between both. Part of the day I wrought as copper-smith, the other as painter.

"It was not unusual for me to be called out of the shop and see a fair lady who wanted her picture painted.

"The encouragement I received finally induced me to relinquish the copper business entirely. About this time a Mr. Barton, whose memory I will ever gratefully cherish, strongly urged me to visit the celebrated Stuart of Boston. I went and was fortunate enough to meet with a handsome reception from that gentleman, through the cooperation of the late Alex J. Dallas and his son George who were at Boston at that time and he felt a lively interest in my success.

"Previous to my visit to Boston I had painted a portrait of Mr. Nicolas Biddle, President of the United States Bank, and as it required in visiting Stuart that I should have a specimen of skill with me, in order to know whether I was an imposter or not, Mr. Biddle very politely offered me the picture I had painted for him, and which was well received by the great artist.

"Here I had a fiery trial to undergo. My picture was placed along side the best of his hand, and that lesson I considered the best I ever had received: the comparison was, I thought, enough, and if I had vanity before I went, it left me all before my return. I must do Stuart justice to say that he gave me sound lectures and hope. I did not fail to profit by them.

"My native place being too small for giving scope to a painter, I removed to Philadelphia, where by an incessant practice of ten years, and constant employment, I have been enabled again to remove to my native place, with a decent competence, and a mind still urging on for further improvement, having but now, at this period of my life, just conceptions of the great difficulty of reaching the summit of the fine arts. I look forward with more zeal than ever. It is a fire that will never quench; and I hazard nothing in saying that I fully believe that the freedom and happiness of the citizens of this free country will, one day, produce painters as great, if not greater than any that have embellished the palaces of Europe."<sup>2</sup>

It was no accident that Eichholtz could establish himself rather

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 384-386.





12. MARTHA BYE LONGSTRECH—*Pennsylvania State Museum*



quickly. There was a "rage for portraits" at that time. Aaron Burr as early as 1805 wrote to his protégé, John Vanderlyn, urging him to return. But portraiture did not appeal to Vanderlyn, and when dwindling resources finally brought him home, he deliberately refused commissions as often as he could afford to. Most artists did not scorn this profitable work. Sully was making \$3,000-\$4,000 a year—a princely income then—and others were doing as well.<sup>3</sup> Eichholtz, like his mentors Stuart and Sully, found the work rewarding, and his faces have a sincerity and rugged forthrightness reflective of the artist's own rustic integrity.

Actually, if we are to credit family tradition, his first-known work was not a portrait, but a childish attempt, at age twelve, to depict the "Capture of André." The picture has been passed down through several generations of Eichholtzes and is still in existence. The same descendant owns a pleasant landscape of indeterminate origin; another, of Conestoga Creek, was destroyed recently in a flood. His depiction of Delaware's "Cape Henlopen" is now in the Philadelphia Museum. He also produced a "Crucifixion," now in St. James Church, Lancaster. A group picture, "Washington and His Generals" is in the Karolik Collection, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Still in existence at the Pennsylvania Farm Museum at Landis Valley is his sign for the William Pitt Tavern. And in his own time he was widely congratulated for the "taste and liberality" with which he decorated the Lancaster Union Hose Company carriage. He could and would turn his hand to almost anything, especially in his early days.

But most of his time was spent in "taking likenesses." His style progressed from simple, provincial profiles to elaborate, full-length portraits in the romantic Victorian tradition. Some of the earliest are on small wood panels, like those of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Cochrane, of Barnard Wolff (1811), Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Elliott (1809) in the New-York Historical Society, and the Leman family in the National Gallery of Art. His directness is equally evident in his full-size portraits, such as that of Rev. James Ross Reily (1814) and of Martha Bye Longstreth (1819). He had not yet sufficiently absorbed the English influence through Sully when

<sup>3</sup> Flexner, James T., *The Light of Distant Skies*, New York, Harcourt-Brace, 1954, 200, 143-144.

he harshly recorded the visage of a "Mennonite Woman" (now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art).

His early portraits of children, like the Maris brothers (c. 1815) or his own son Edward Eichholtz, painted from memory after death, have a great provincial charm. But they only need to be compared with the Philadelphia Museum's "Dorothea," signed and dated 1841, the year before his death, with all the elegant romanticism of the Victorian period, to see the great change in his style over thirty years.

Many of Eichholtz's subjects were friends, neighbors, and relatives. He painted and repainted the many members of the Eichholtz and Leman families. In addition to those in the hands of his descendants, there is a fine group of his own family at the Lancaster County Historical Society. He was not without famous subjects, however. It was a portrait of Nicholas Biddle he tucked under his arm when he went to see Stuart, and he later did another of the distinguished Philadelphia banker. His portraits of Thaddeus Stevens and James Buchanan are generally accepted as the best that were done of these statesmen.

Indeed, Eichholtz's name largely disappeared from the annals of American art after Dunlap's work, and he was accepted only as the virtually unknown limner of these two famous men. The principal histories of American painting do not mention him; even so recent a volume as James T. Flexner's *The Light of Distant Skies*, which devotes itself to the early nineteenth century, ignores him. Virgil Barker, in his recent *American Painting*, is faintly condescending. Echoes of a new appreciation first appear in Edgar P. Richardson's definitive *Painting in America*, which finds a "good sense of character in portraits of the old, an innocent sweetness in portraits of children, and a hard, clean, fresh, luminous style that neither fades nor grows dingy—qualities of an excellent craftsman and an unsophisticated, natural sensibility."<sup>4</sup>

Even in his home state Eichholtz is not well known, nor are his works prominently exhibited. Fine examples of them are included in the collections of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania State Museum, but most of these are not often on display. The largest collection on permanent exhibit

<sup>4</sup> Richardson, Edgar P., *Painting in America*, New York, Crowell, 1956, 124.





15. EDWARD EICHHOLTZ—*Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*



is in the Lancaster County Historical Society, where many of the especially interesting family portraits have come to rest. Only two major showings of his work have taken place—in Lancaster in 1912<sup>5</sup> (as a part of a broader exhibit) and at the Philadelphia Art Alliance in 1943.<sup>6</sup>

In April, 1959, there is scheduled at the York County Historical Society, under auspices of the Pennsylvania State Museum which assembled it, the first major, retrospective exhibition of his work. From this exhibit of more than fifty paintings, depicting the evolution of his style from provincial to romantic, fifteen illustrations have been selected to accompany this article. The author joins with many others in the hope that the exhibit will help to restore Jacob Eichholtz to a proper place in the hierarchy of Pennsylvania—and American—painters.

<sup>5</sup> *Loan Exhibition of Historical and Contemporary Portraits illustrating the evolution of portraiture in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, under the auspices of the Iris Club and the Historical Society of Lancaster County . . . Nov. 23-Dec. 13, 1912.* (Lists 119 portraits on exhibit; reproduces two.) This was supplemented by publication of an address by W. W. Hensel, *Jacob Eichholtz: Painter. Some Loose Leaves from the Ledger of an Early Lancaster Artists* [1912]. Lists known portraits; reproduces six.)

<sup>6</sup> *Jacob Eichholtz 1776-1842. American Artist, October 6 to October 31, 1943. Philadelphia Art Alliance.* (Biographical sketch, lists 36 paintings, reproduces one.)