

*John Caspar Wild:
Some New Facts and a Query*

IT CAN now be stated with assurance that the Swiss painter and lithographer John Caspar Wild was at work in Philadelphia as early as 1831 or 1832, that by 1833 he had painted in water color two views of Fairmount (and possibly other local scenes), that in the spring of 1835 he left Philadelphia for the West, was in Cincinnati by November of that year, remained there at least until the close of February, 1836, and *returned* to Philadelphia in 1837.

The first of these hitherto disputed facts¹—his presence in Philadelphia before going to Ohio—is established by a lengthy editorial notice in the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* for August 1, 1835:

Some three, or at most, four years since, our city was visited by an artist whose skill in sketching, drawing upon stone, and particularly his great proficiency in coloring, attracted considerable attention, though, we regret to add, that his superior merits did not secure for him that encouragement to which he was so richly entitled. His paintings in water colours were of the finest order, and many of them that we have seen fully equalled the best of those Italian views, especially those of Naples, Mount Vesuvius, and other excellent productions that so much excited admiration in this city two or three years since. We never saw an artist whose taste in colouring assimilated so closely and faithfully to nature, and we now have in our possession two views of Fair Mount, executed in water colours, by Mr. Casper Wild, the name of this young artist. . . . The landscapes of his production, particularly in the tints of foliage, and the rich, almost living, hues of his skies, were delicate and beautiful in the extreme.

The editor of the *Saturday Courier*, Andrew M'Makin, was deeply concerned about the disappearance of the promising young artist, who, "discouraged by the coldness of his reception in our city and anxious to advance his fortunes," had left Philadelphia "about four

¹ Martin P. Snyder in "J. C. Wild and His Philadelphia Views," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVII (1953), 32 (and notes 3 and 54) holds that Wild first reached Philadelphia in 1837.



Phelps Stokes Collection, The New York Public Library

VIEW OF READING, PENNSYLVANIA

months since, with a view to visiting Mexico, by way of the western waters and New Orleans." Wild had taken with him "a splendid collection of engravings and paintings, besides a considerable quantity of watches and jewellery." Since his departure nothing had been heard of him. The editor, anxious on his behalf, was now writing "to solicit the attention of our friends in New Orleans to his fate," for he had "heard the melancholy intelligence of the death of Mr. Wild, either immediately after his arrival at that port, or while on his passage there on board a steam boat."

The report of Wild's death, was, of course, as M'Makin hoped, false. Instead of continuing on to New Orleans and Mexico, he had stopped off at Cincinnati and had set to work in his accustomed fashion. "There is a young artist here," wrote Nicholas Longworth from Cincinnati to Hiram Powers on November 13, 1835, "a Frenchman, by the name of Wild, who has taken some views of our Town, from different points, and also some of our public & private buildings. His views are in water colors, and showy [?]. He will probably, at my suggestion, publish a series of views (lithographic). It may aid in counteracting the veto and induce some persons to move to a place where such splendid views are to be seen. One gentleman was desirous to have a view of his premises taken, but not as they then were, but with [*word illegible*] a house, out buildings &c, as he contemplated to build them some 20 years hence."²

That Wild passed the winter at Cincinnati is made certain by a postscript to another letter from Longworth to Powers, dated February 28, 1836: "We have an artist here, Wilde, a young frenchman, with much taste & tallent. He is taking views of our town & particular parts of it, with a view to make Lithographs from them which he will color."³

How long Wild remained in Cincinnati and how many views he painted there cannot be established. The fact that no lithographs of these subjects have ever been recorded strongly indicates that he published none. Perhaps it was a lack of interest in the project that sent him back to Philadelphia. We can, however, say firmly now that the five street views owned by the Historical and Philosophical

² Hiram Powers Manuscripts, Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio.

³ *Ibid.*

Society of Ohio should be dated 1835-1836. The first "View of Cincinnati" would almost certainly be dated 1835, for the artist's initial advertisement of his skill would be such a town view. This picture must have pleased, for there are at least five such gouache paintings (previously I had reported four).⁴ The following order is one of convenience, not precedence: (1) owned by the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, c. 26" x 34"; (2) owned by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 19" x 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ "⁵; (3) another owned by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; (4) owned by Richard S. Hawes of St. Louis, c. 10" x 15"; and (5) one represented by a photograph in the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio. In all of these, the view is taken from the same spot across the river on a hill overlooking Cincinnati. The pictures are closely alike yet with sufficient difference in the handling of the foliage in the foreground, especially to the extreme right and left, and of steamboats in the river that they are all separately identifiable. Nos. 1 and 2 are the most nearly identical, yet even they have distinguishing points.

On the artist's return to Philadelphia, Martin P. Snyder has noted, "Wild moved into 72 Dock Street, the same building which housed Philadelphia's *Saturday Courier*," and he has suggested that the *Views of Philadelphia* resulted from a merging of Wild's plans with a proposal of Holden and M'Makin to publish engraved illustrations of the city's public buildings under the title of *The Lions of Philadelphia*.⁶ In view of the facts that Wild had earlier painted a number of views during his first stay in the city and had been well known to the editors of the *Saturday Courier*, both as painter and as lithographer, it seems reasonable to assume that *The Lions of Philadelphia* announced first on July 15, 1837, was the earliest statement of plans for the work which presently became the *Views of Philadelphia*, 1838. Consequently, Wild must have been back in Philadelphia by mid-summer, 1837, and, quite probably, months earlier. It can be asserted, too, that the "View of Fairmount" owned by The Historical

⁴ John Francis McDermott, "J. C. Wild, Western Painter and Lithographer," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, LX (1951), 112-125. The first of these I reproduced; No. 3 is the added picture.

⁵ Reproduced in the Old Print Shop *Portfolio* (January, 1946), 120.

⁶ Snyder, 33.

Society of Pennsylvania was painted not in 1837 or 1838, but in 1831 or 1832.⁷

I now submit a query. The New York Public Library owns a water color and gouache painting, *c.* 20" x 30", identified as a view of Reading, Pennsylvania, and dated *c.* 1834. In *American Historical Prints* (Plate 54 b) it is credited "probably" to Zeno Schindler. J. T. Bowen published a lithograph of it, copyrighted 1839. Comparison of that painting, however, with the work of Wild—the first and second views of Cincinnati, or the view of Davenport, 1844, for example—strongly suggests that Wild painted this view also. Perhaps some evidence of a visit to Reading by Wild may yet be found to confirm this attribution.

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JOHN FRANCIS McDERMOTT

⁷ It was probably this "View of Fairmount" that was exhibited by B. M'Makin, its owner, at the Artists' Fund Exhibition in 1840. Anna Wells Rutledge, *Cumulative Record of Exhibition Catalogues: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1807-1870* (Philadelphia, 1955), 252.

Lithographic Note

IN THE list of views contained in *Philadelphia in the Romantic Age of Lithography*, published by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1958, there is included a stirring military scene of the Artillery Corps of Philadelphia Grays. This crack outfit, commanded by General George Cadwalader, is depicted in a spirited drill on the Powelton grounds in West Philadelphia. Alfred Hoffy drew the lithograph and P. S. Duval printed it in 1845.

Little survives of the business records of artists like Hoffy or printers like Duval, and it is rare in the case of any lithograph to know how many copies of it were made and what its costs were. General Cadwalader, however, never threw away a receipted bill and, since he sponsored the lithograph of the Philadelphia Grays, the pertinent bills have been preserved among his papers at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. These bills show that the original cost of each copy was thirty-seven cents, or a dollar and thirty-seven cents if colored.

N. B. W.

Philadelphia
23d Sepr. 1845
88 Walnut St.

Messrs Andrews & Foley* in a/c with A. Hoffy

To forming a diagram etc on the spot of Corps of Flying Artillery commanded by Genl. George Cadwallader, making two separate pencil sketches or drawings, and finally reducing one to a design with particulars and colored up, sufficient to commence the plate from, and subsequently making various detached sketches at different times with the view of rendering the whole plate as accurate as possible.

To executing a lithographic drawing complete, for coloring, from the above \$75.

All performed under the immediate inspection and guidance of Genl. George Cadwallader, and otherwise aided by Messrs Andrews & Foley

25 Sepr 1845

Recd of Mr. Foley, Seventy five dollars in full for the above

\$75.

A. Hoffy

Philada October 24th 1845

Genl. Geo. Cadwalader

To P. S. Duval Dr.

To lettering "Artillery Corps of Philadelphia Greys"	1st time	\$ 4.00
To do do do	2nd time	3.00
To printing 310 Copies of the above plate @	\$4.00	12.40
To paper for the same		12.40
To Stone bearing the above drawing		7.00
		<u>\$38.80</u>

Recd. Payment

P. S. Duval

pr. P. C. Holtis

4th Febr'y 1846

Gen Cadwalader

To John Childs

Coloring 40 Artillery plates @ \$1 dollar each \$40

Recd. for John Childs

9th Febr'y 1846

A. Hoffy

* Thomas A. Andrews was a member of the Philadelphia Grays; David F. Foley was Cadwalader's clerk.