William L. Breton, Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia Artist

"There was always a mystery about him that I could never understand." This appraisal of William L. Breton, by a man who knew him as well as anyone in America, typifies the lack of information on the background of this little-known maker of nineteenth-century Philadelphia views whose work is so important today in the Society Hill redevelopment of the old city.

It was not later than 1824 that Breton arrived in Philadelphia, having left England for reasons best known to himself. Charles V. Hagner, who wrote the only pen sketch of Breton, says that he learned for the first time after Breton's death that the artist had left a wife and a number of children in England. Already more than fifty years of age when he emigrated, Breton's complete break with the past extended even to his vocation. "He was a self-made artist, and told me his first attempt at drawing was on board ship on his passage to this country."  

Hagner's reminiscences provide our first glimpse of Breton, already busily sketching in Philadelphia in 1824:

In that year, as near as I can remember, there was a fashionable bookstore on the south side of Chestnut Street between Second and Third, kept by Mr. Poole, who was an agent for his father, a large publisher in London. I frequently called there when in the city, and on one occasion there were two gentlemen in the store conversing on a subject that interested me; I listened for a short time and left. The next day I saw a person sitting on a stump at the foot of Church Street taking a sketch of the Stritzel House, subsequently torn down. I went towards him and discovered that it was one of the gentlemen I had seen the day before in Mr. Poole's store. It was Mr. Breton; I introduced myself to him and asked him if he resided in the neighborhood. He replied in the negative, and said he only intended to

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1 Charles V. Hagner, Early History of the Falls of the Schuylkill, Manayunk (Philadelphia, 1869), 90.
2 Ibid.
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

LOXLEY HOUSE AT SECOND STREET AND LITTLE DOCK
Wash drawing, 1835
North Corners of Race and Front Streets
Wash drawing, 1835
stay two or three days. I then asked him where he was located; he mentioned
the place, and I told him he could be more comfortably accommodated at
the Leverington hotel on the Ridge road, where I then boarded. He came
there the next day, intending, as he said, to stay there two or three days; he
continued there and at Manayunk for many years.

Nothing drawn by Breton at this early date has been found, but
it is noteworthy that even then he manifested an antiquarian interest
in old buildings about to be removed from the scene. Perhaps he
destroyed his efforts of that year, but from 1825 there remains a
water color titled by Breton "State House." Except for the interesting
lines of projection of the buildings on Chestnut Street, the
drawing focuses on the people strolling along the busy thoroughfare.
This emphasis is not characteristic of Breton's mature drawings. In
1826, however, he was working in the style of all his later pictures.
The subject of a dated water color of that year was geographically
close to the State House, but the technique of its presentation is far
different from that of the picture made one year earlier. The Car-
penter Mansion on Chestnut Street above Sixth had begun its span
as a country seat in the first half of the eighteenth century, but had
become surrounded by business activity. Most recently occupied by
Justice Tilghman, it was now vacant and in April, 1826, was demol-
ished. Breton recorded it and its setting just as that process was
about to begin. His work carries a sense of detachment from
everyday affairs, of countrified simplicity; the ancient character of
the structure is conveyed by more than its lines alone.

Breton's ability to convey a "primitive" atmosphere and his
fondness for depicting buildings surviving from an earlier period
were most unusual for his day. These traits were to play an important
part in his first business arrangement of consequence.

The historian John F. Watson had for many years been contem-
plating his *Annals of Philadelphia*. His early suggestion that the

and Pennsylvania, in the Olden-Time*, manuscript copy in The Historical Society of Pennsyl-
vania (HSP), hereinafter cited as Dreer MS *Annals*.

4 "Side and back view (NE) of the late residence of the Honb J. Judge Tilghman, dec'd
taken in 1826." (7" x 5"), HSP. Other copies, probably later, are "SE view of the Residence of the
late Chief Justice Tilghman—taken in 1826—which, during the Revolutionary War, was the
Residence of the Minister of France." (7¼" x 5¾"), Athenaeum of Philadelphia (hereinafter
cited as Athenaeum); and an untitled copy signed "WLB" (10½" x 7½"), Library Company
of Philadelphia.
work be done by someone else had led to the incorporation of his ideas in the prospectus for James Mease's *Picture of Philadelphia*, published in 1811. When the work appeared, however, it left Watson's "scheme untouched," and he therefore continued his own efforts. By 1826, he had compiled voluminous manuscript volumes, and had made numerous rough sketches of old buildings, for Watson clearly considered it necessary to accompany his descriptions with pictures. In writing to Roberts Vaux at the end of 1826 about obtaining a finished picture reconstructing Penn's first landing at Philadelphia, Watson referred to one of his own sketches:

I have an original perspective sketch on Denis paper, of what I think should express the localities of Penn's landing at Guest's Tavern at Dock Creek Mouth. This might be usefully consulted by Mr. Sully, if he selects that site as the subject of his painting.\(^5\)

The method of depicting this particular scene, and the importance of doing it properly for future generations, were much on Watson's mind. Before receiving a reply, he elaborated his ideas to Vaux:

In thinking further upon the contemplated Painting of Penn's landing, I feel a concern lest Mr. Sully's talent will not be the best adapted to make a *Popular* display. ... I entertain the idea ... that such a man as Doughty would display a more acceptable talent than the other, and at a much more moderate price. My reasons are these:—

A picture intended for general acceptance—one which the People, the general mass of Society, would most admire, because it would most stir and affect their feelings, would be a Landscape or perspective, embracing such compass of the horizon as would show distinctly the meanderings of Dock Creek, Drinking Hut at 2nd St., the celebrated spring vis a vis to Guests Blue Anchor,—The River Delaware,—and the distant Treaty Tree; the high land of Coaquannock and the tall grove of Spruce Pines;—some caves and huts on the River Bank of the first Settlers; Guests blue anchor house and the foundation of Budds adjoining "long row";—In the foreground Penn and his company there landing from his boat from Chester;—and the precious Settlers and Indians making him welcome—The whole of this Scenery would be so different (and yet true) from any present conceptions of the Philadelphians, that their surprise would constitute the great charm of the painting! As we have no certain or absolutely true likeness of Penn and his compatriots, the diminished size of their portraits will be better appreciated, as I conceive, in small characters than in large ones—Now with

\(^5\) Watson to Vaux, Nov. 24, 1826, HSP.
all respect for the undisputed talents of Mr. Sully for his historical design, which in truth means much fancy and imagination, we shall have Penn and a few others as large as life, . . . to the entire exclusion of the finest materials of the truly primitive Scenery and landing of the Founder. . . . If I should get such a man as Doughty to paint me a Parlour picture according to my idea of that landing (from my present demi size on Paper) might he not take a hint to make a much larger and more imposing one for his own exhibition and emolument?  

Watson apparently had no knowledge of Breton at this time, but in the spring of 1828, according to Philadelphia historian Joseph Jackson, their meeting took place on the Wissahickon. In a tramp along that stream, Watson came upon the artist sketching, just as Hagner had done. The author found Breton to be just the man to prepare illustrations for the projected Annals, which were published in 1830.

This was an important meeting for Breton. Undoubtedly, his strong antiquarian streak was the catalyst in the new friendship. Watson may have caught immediately a warm, homely quality in Breton’s work that would provide the unsophisticated approach he wanted for his illustrations. Moreover, he may have sensed an affinity between Breton’s work and his own drawings, which needed more finished treatment.

As a result of their meeting, Breton’s work received both moral encouragement and financial support. Watson showed Breton his sketches of long-gone buildings and scenes, and also his correspondence with Peter S. DuPonceau. In this, DuPonceau had described the house in which he was then living as it had appeared years before when he had served in it with the Office for Foreign Affairs. Breton, in turn, showed Watson his water color of the Carpenter Mansion, which Watson had not recorded for himself. There was, however, a heading in the manuscript Annals on this building, and Breton’s picture was accepted for the book.

Watson wished the illustrations for his work to follow the text closely, including the reconstruction of the scene of Penn’s landing.

6 Watson to Vaux, Dec. 6, 1826, HSP.
But only about a third of the great mass of material to be published dealt with descriptions of old buildings. It was this third of the manuscript to which Breton addressed himself. He set out upon the double task of using Watson's text and other supporting sources to portray nonexistent scenes, and of recording sites still extant. His work was all done in water colors, and seems to have been started in the latter part of 1828.

Watson was pleased with Breton's work and communicated his satisfaction to Samuel C. Atkinson, guiding spirit of *The Casket*, a magazine which had begun publication in Philadelphia in 1827. Each month *The Casket* pictured scenes described in the text, usually in or near the city. In nearly every case the artist's rendering was engraved on a small wooden block, so that the picture page could be run with the letter press; in only a few cases were copperplate engravings included, which entailed a separate printing process. Atkinson needed a new source for his illustrations. His wood engraver, George Gilbert, had been copying views just published in Childs' *Views of Philadelphia*. This procedure may have met with objection; or perhaps Atkinson simply wanted scenes which had not already appeared elsewhere. In any event, he approached Breton, who would have to supply the water color only; Gilbert would take care of making the plate. Breton found he could fit this work in with his drawings for Watson, and was retained.

Work for the magazine went forward quickly. Water colors dated 1828 of Old Swedes' Church⁹ and of Loxley's House on Second Street¹⁰ were published as *Casket* engravings in 1829 and 1830. The scenes may have been drawn in the course of a tour Breton made in 1828 of areas which today are parts of Philadelphia and its suburbs, but which were then considerably outside the city. He sketched the Penn Treaty Monument at Shackamaxon,¹¹ moved on to the Penn-

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⁹ "S. E. view of the Swedes Church Southwark, taken in 1828." (7½" x 5¼"), HSP; and another copy, "The Swedes Church, Southwark. (taken 1828)" (7¼" x 5½"), Athenaeum. This scene was reproduced as "Swedes Church, Philadelphia," March, 1829, facing p. 121.

¹⁰ "Loxley's House in Second Street. (taken 1828) from the balcony of which Whitfield used to address a numerous auditory." (7½" x 5¾"), Athenaeum; and another copy titled in another hand (7" x 5½"), HSP. This was reproduced as "Loxley House, Second Street," September, 1830, facing p. 409.

¹¹ "Treaty Ground of Wm Penn & the Indian Natives, 1682, at Shackamaxon (now Kensington)" (7¼" x 5½"), HSP.
pack Creek where he drew the bridge, and then to Holmesburg to depict the Washington Inn and Pennock's Mill. Passing through Gray's Ferry, he painted the ancient Friends' Meeting at Merion, the Havertown Meeting, "Harriton," the home of Charles Thomson in Bryn Mawr, St. David's Church, built in 1715 at Radnor, and Waynesborough, the home of General Anthony Wayne. Finally, he sketched the site of the Paoli Massacre, in which Wayne had been involved. Many of these water color scenes, reduced to *The Casket*’s standard size of about 4½" x 3", appeared in the magazine, commencing with the issue of January, 1829. In that year alone seven woodcuts can be identified as being reproduced from Breton's drawings, and he may have supplied the original work for still others.

Breton obtained very little public recognition for his talents by these prints. Even in those cases where his name was cut into the wooden block along with Gilbert’s, it was hardly visible except to the trained eye. It would have been appropriate to include a biographical sketch of Breton in the magazine when his work first appeared, but the only comment on him came in the second issue, February, 1829, parenthetically and as an afterthought:

The accompanying engraving [of Gray’s Ferry] by George Gilbert, from an original drawing by Mr. Breton, (a landscape painter of promise, who deserves to be better known and encouraged, for his zeal, skill, and indefatigable industry,) is a good view, taken from the eastern side of the bridge, and differs only in the hereinafter noted improvements of the

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12 Water colors of Pennypack Bridge, Washington Inn, Pennock's Mill and Gray's Ferry have not been located.
13 Water color titled in another hand (7¾" x 5½"), HSP.
14 Water color titled in another hand (6" x 4¼"), HSP.
15 "The Residence (for nearly 40 years) of the late Chaª Thompson Esq.—taken in 1828, Merion, Montgomery County." (7½" x 5½"), Athenaeum; and another copy titled in another hand (7¾" x 5½"), HSP.
16 "The Episcopal Church of St David, at Radnor—with the Monument of Gen¹ Wayne." (6¾" x 4¼"), Dreer MS *Annals*; and another copy titled in another hand (7½" x 5½"), HSP.
18 "Paoli Monument—taken in 1828—WLB." (6½" x 7¼"), HSP; and another copy, same size, titled in another hand, Dreer MS *Annals*.
19 "Monument on the Scite [sic] of the Elm Tree, near Philadelphia.," January, facing p. 25; "Gray's Ferry, near Philadelphia.," February, facing p. 73; "Swedes Church, Philadelphia.," March, facing p. 121; "Wharton House." (Walnut Grove Mansion), August, facing p. 361; "Pennock's Mill, Holmesburg, Pa.," and "Unitarian Church, Philadelphia.," September, facing p. 413; "St. David’s Church, Radnor.," October, facing p. 457.
Ferry, from an old painting now in possession of the widow of the late Thomas Lieper, Esq. a grand-daughter of George Gray, an early proprietor of the property.\footnote{The Casket (February, 1829), 73.}

Although the \textit{Casket} prints have a quaint and old cast to them, they do very little to preserve the artistic quality of Breton's work. They suffer not only from lack of the colors Breton used, but from failure (by reduction in size) to preserve his feeling of light and air. In several cases his water colors, in size about $7\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{1}{2}''$, are still available for comparison.

Breton had no reason to be concerned, however, about a blight upon his infant reputation from the woodcuts. Our present-day reaction to them diverges sharply from the contemporary praise they received. Daniel Bowen, using wood engraving copiously in his 1839 \textit{History of Philadelphia}, says:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{ENGRAVING ON WOOD}
\end{quote}

The very great improvement that has been made in this City within the last few years, in the Art of Engraving on Wood, has caused it to be employed as a mode of illustrating works of different kinds, including those of the most splendid description.

Independent of its being made capable of producing the most effective and highly finished pictures, the immense number of impressions they will yield, and the fact that they can be printed with the letter-press, is a still further recommendation.\footnote{Daniel Bowen, \textit{A History of Philadelphia} (Philadelphia, 1839), 186.}

Reuben S. Gilbert, one of Breton's wood engravers, was also highly regarded as one "whose success in producing perfect specimens, is sufficient evidence of his advancement, in this branch of the Fine Arts."

Breton's work for Watson continued along with that for \textit{The Casket}. He found that some of the early buildings discussed in Watson's manuscript were still standing. The Old Court House, for example, erected twenty-five years after the founding of the city, stood in the middle of Market Street, and with this he combined in one drawing the Friends' Meeting House, which had been removed years earlier from the adjacent corner.\footnote{Water color titled in another hand (10\textfrac{3}{4}" $\times$ 7\textfrac{13}{16}''), HSP. See "The old Court House & Friends Meeting.,” \textit{Annals}, facing p. 295.} The London Coffee House
still sat at Front and Market streets; Letitia House and Penn’s Philadelphia home, the Slate Roof House, were very near; and at Sixth Street was the DuPonceau home, formerly the offices of the State Department. All these he drew, sometimes trying to set the structure into the surroundings of an earlier day, or to show with it an activity to be described in the book. Thus the Letitia House ultimately appeared in the country atmosphere of its first days, and the London Coffee House became the scene of an auction of newly arrived slaves.

In picturing the High Street Market (pulled down in 1763) and the Stone Prison at Third and High streets (sold in 1722), Shippen’s house in Second Street (demolished in 1790), the Morris House, once Washington’s home on Market Street, the scene at Dock Creek drawbridge, and the Fairman Mansion at the Penn Treaty Tree (the mansion removed in 1825), Breton had the benefit of Watson’s sketches and descriptive material. Sometimes the sketches were closely followed, and always they were used in obtaining the lines of the buildings, which might then be set in aspects differing from the sketch. Although the results could hardly be exactly what Watson wanted in every case, the pictures which were selected for publication “passed muster” in all instances but one.

After reviewing Watson’s material on Pegg’s Run, a former stream in the Race Street area which by then had been arched over, Breton

23 Water color titled in another hand “Stokes Old London Coffee House” (7" x 5"), HSP; “Letitia House. (taken in 1828)” (7" x 5½"), HSP; “The old Slate-House in Second Street previous to its being altered.” (7½" x 5"), HSP, and “The Slate House of Penn in Second Street, previous to its being altered, so called, from the Roof and Pavement in front being of Slate.” (7½" x 5½"), Athenaeum; and “Department of the United States for Foreign Affairs...” (7½" x 5½"), HSP.

24 Water color not located, but see “High Street & Market Shambles,” Annals, facing p. 301.


27 Water color not located, but see “Drawbridge & Blue Anchor Inn...” Annals, facing p. 121.

chose as the guide for his drawing one of two sketches by Watson, one which emphasized the irrigation and pasturing aspects of the creek. Watson had also included in his manuscript an attractive Pegg's Run skating scene. In the *Annals* he pointed out that his own sketches remained available for reference and said of his winter scene: "The picture, as a skating scene, is more to the ideas in my mind, than the one given in this work. There were difficulties in forming the picture of 'things before,' which the present artist could not overcome." Actually, Breton had closely copied the Watson sketch he had chosen, and the canal-like quality of the creek was mentioned in the text. Watson’s comment seems unfair.

While in his work for *The Casket* Breton had managed to stay clear of the mechanical problem of reproducing his drawings, Watson was apparently not satisfied with the Gilbert woodcuts and wanted Breton to preserve in the *Annals* more of the quality of his originals. This propelled Breton into considering both copperplate engraving and the newly developing art of lithography. Certainly, he was right in eventually settling upon the latter, which afforded him the opportunity to draw freely on stone with a crayon, as opposed to gouging lines from a plate of copper with a burin. He seems first to have tried the copperplate technique, however, for the *Annals* was published with four unidentified engravings, tightly executed and not very well drawn. Why Watson accepted or Breton was satisfied with these is difficult to understand. Although they account for only a sixth of the final number of illustrations, the subjects were important ones: "The Treaty Tree & Fairman’s Mansion"; "Clarke’s Hall & Dock Creek," with its gardens running down to the stream; the first Swedes’ Church, predecessor of Old Swedes’; and, above all, "The Landing of Penn at Dock Creek Philada.,” showing the features Watson had so clearly in mind. The presence of this last scene among the engravings and its special importance to Watson justifies the inference that it was one of the first assignments to be worked upon, and thus that the engravings were an early and experimental

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30 *Annals*, 735.
31 Only one water color for these, that of the Fairman Mansion, has been found, and it is Breton’s. See Note 28 above.
form of graphic work by Breton. Perhaps cost considerations required their being retained if they met minimum standards.

In all the remaining drawings, which were put on stone, Breton achieved better results in transferring the atmosphere of his water colors. But even here a difficulty developed. Watson instructed him in some cases to place two half-size drawings on one stone to conserve paper and cost. The full-page lithographs were small enough—about $6\frac{1}{4}\times 4''$—and even further reduction from the size of the water color brought problems of deleting figures, simplifying buildings, and the like, to avoid a dark and cluttered print. Breton felt he could not afford to produce two small plates for the price of one large one, and Watson took the matter up with his publishers, Carey & Hart, after the work was done but before making payment:

Mr W L Breton charges me the same price each for 2 lithographs done on one 8vo page, as he does for one large one filling the same page, saying he found it more difficult to do little ones than big ones, and had rather have done large ones at less than little ones—I thought I had understood that he would do each 8vo for a given price whether it had one or many subjects—What I wish in the premises is that you might enquire . . . of Mr Childs or Kearney, what is their practice and if Mr Breton’s idea is not unreasonable or unusual I shall acquiesce in his views. . . .

The printing of the plates was done by Kennedy & Lucas, the first commercial lithographic firm in Philadelphia, formed at the end of 1828. Watson had known of David Kennedy for years, and it was probably Watson who arranged his getting the business, even though he referred his inquiry about prices to the competing firm which included Childs and Kearney.

Throughout 1829 Breton produced water colors. That of Walnut Grove, site of the British army’s Meschianza fete during the Revolutionary War, was not accepted for the book and was drawn a second time for The Casket, where it appeared in the August issue. “Shippen’s House,” the residence of the provincial governors off Second Street, removed in 1792, was accepted for the Annals. Of the

32 Watson to Carey & Hart, July 13, [1830], HSP.
33 “Walnut Grove the Head Quarters of the British Army, under Genl Sir Wm Howe, in front of which the celebrated Fete, called the Meschianza, was given in May 1778.” (9\frac{1}{4}'' x 6\frac{3}{4}''), HSP; and another copy, similarly titled (9\frac{3}{8}'' x 6\frac{3}{4}''), Athenaeum.
Friends’ Bank Meeting\textsuperscript{34} and the Friends’ Academy,\textsuperscript{35} only the Meeting view was accepted by Watson. And while Breton worked on subjects matching the headings in the book,\textsuperscript{36} other antiquarian sights were beginning to catch his eye which he portrayed even though they were hardly suitable for publication in either the book or the magazine. These were curious corners and scenes, such as Norris Alley and Front Street,\textsuperscript{37} and Third Street near Race.\textsuperscript{38}

With all this activity, Breton determined in 1829 to draw a series of views of the city’s churches, to be published as lithographs. This was to be the only published set of his views. The plates were an ambitious venture, in size varying only slightly and ranging up to about 12” x 8”. The set consisted of eight subjects, more than half the prints carrying attribution to Breton. Intending to show the buildings used by different faiths, he included the Friends,\textsuperscript{39} Episcopalians,\textsuperscript{40} Presbyterians,\textsuperscript{41} Catholics,\textsuperscript{42} Unitarians,\textsuperscript{43} and certain Negro congregations.\textsuperscript{44} All but one of the black and white plates were printed by Kennedy & Lucas in 1829 and 1830. Today all are rare.

As 1830 came in, Breton was active on a number of fronts. The Casket published eight more of his water colors, reduced and trans-

\textsuperscript{34} Water color not located, but see “Friends’ Bank Meeting,” Annals, facing p. 335.
\textsuperscript{35} Water color titled in another hand “Friends Academy 4 below Chestnut Street” (9\frac{3}{4}" x 6\frac{3}{4}"), HSP.
\textsuperscript{36} The Philadelphia Academy, later the University of Pennsylvania, titled in another hand “The Old Academy Buildings in 4th Street as originally constructed.—” (7" x 4\frac{3}{4}"), HSP; and the Lutheran Church, titled in another hand “German Church 5th near Arch St” (7\frac{3}{4}" x 4\frac{3}{4}"), HSP. It was apparently at this time that Breton also drew Carpenter’s Hall (5\frac{3}{4}" x 6\frac{3}{4}"), and the Rock House, Germantown, where Penn preached (8" x 6"), both titled in another hand, HSP.
\textsuperscript{37} “Norris’s Alley & Front Str. 1829—WLB” (7\frac{3}{4}" x 5\frac{3}{4}"), HSP.
\textsuperscript{38} Titled in another hand, but signed “W L Breton, 1829” (8" x 7\frac{3}{4}"), HSP.
\textsuperscript{39} “A Monday Morning View of Friends Meeting House and Academy, Philad. Forty years ago.” and “A Fourth day Morning View of Friends Meeting House on Cherry Street, Philadelphia.” See Nicholas B. Wainwright, Philadelphia in the Romantic Age of Lithography (Philadelphia, 1958), 10 (general mention) and 94 (full descriptions).
\textsuperscript{40} “North-East View of St. Peter’s Church (Episcopal) Philada.” See Wainwright, 173.
\textsuperscript{41} “Second Presbyterian Church, City of Philada.—Founded 1750 Enlarged 1809.” See Wainwright, 198.
\textsuperscript{42} “The Catholic Church of St. Mary, Philadelphia.” See Wainwright, 211.
\textsuperscript{43} “Unitarian Church Philadelphia.” See Wainwright, 225, and woodcut reproduction in The Casket (September, 1829), facing p. 413.
\textsuperscript{44} “A Sunday Morning View of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia. —Taken in June 1829.”; also “Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Philada. . . .” See Wainwright, 97, 102.
"East side of Water Street, 3 Doors above Chesn't from the Alley leading to the River"
Wash drawing, 1835
The artist ranged in his sketching from an old foundry near the Upper Ferry on the Schuylkill to the Pemberton House farther down the river. He was attracted by ancient Trotter’s Alley at the Delaware waterfront. He traveled to Chester to draw the first building of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and on to Wilmington to portray the old Friends’ meetinghouse there. The volume of Breton’s work had swelled to the point where he had rented a studio; his pictures for the *Annals* alone Watson referred to as a “collection.”

Interestingly, the studio was on the second or top floor of the new Arcade Building, which had replaced Carpenter’s Mansion, the subject of Breton’s early drawing. In January, 1830, Watson wrote to General Thomas Cadwalader suggesting that he might wish to “inspect the collection of Philada. drawings” done for Watson. At the same time, he asked Breton to “let him see any lithographs done from them.” To quicken Cadwalader’s interest, Watson told him that “one of the pictures—‘Loxley’s House’ serves to illustrate facts concerning ‘Bath Sheba’s bath and Bower’ once a celebrated Spring and Bower . . . on the premises of your Father in So. 2d St. by Spruce St.”

From Watson’s letter it may be inferred that some of the *Annals* lithographs were already on the stones early in 1830. Watson’s

45 “Friends’ Meeting and Old Court House,” January, facing p. 25 (reproduced from water color cited in Note 22 above); “Washington Inn, Holmesburg,” February, facing p. 73; “German Lutheran Zion Church,” May, facing p. 217 (reproduced from water color cited in Note 36 above); “Flat-Rock Bridge, over the Schuylkill,” June, facing p. 265; “Caldwell’s Inn, near Manayunk,” August, facing p. 361; “Loxley House, Second Street,” September, facing p. 409 (see also Note 10 above); “Wissahiccon, on the Schuylkill,” November, facing p. 507; and “Bridge over the Pennepack,” December, facing p. 553.

46 Titled in another hand (8½” x 6”), HSP.

47 Titled in another hand (8½” x 6½”), HSP. “First Water Works—near Schuylkill,—below High St.” (8½” x 6½”), Dreer MS *Annals*, probably dates from this time also.

48 “In Trotter’s Alley, Philad.—taken in 1830 by W L Breton.” (6½” x 5½”), HSP.

49 “The Building in which the first Assembly was convened by Penn, at Chester. W L Breton 1830” (8” x 5¼”), HSP.

50 “The Building in which the Friends held their first Meetings at Wilmington, Del. 1735. W L Breton 1830.” (8” x 5¼”), HSP. This may have been the same journey on which Breton drew two other scenes, “Oxford Church, Philad. County—taken in 1829—WLB” (7” x 4½”) and “Swedes Church Wilmington, Delaware Co [sic]—taken in 1829—WLB” (10” x 7”), both at HSP.

51 Watson to Cadwalader, Jan. 16, 1830, HSP. “Loxley’s House” was drawn for both Watson and *The Casket*, finally rejected for the *Annals*, and published by the magazine just after the book appeared.
manuscript copy contains both lithographs and engravings before any lettering was added, apparently those prints to which he referred.  

**Bad luck plagued Breton, however:** before the necessary number of impressions was printed, at least one and probably two of the stones were broken and the pictures had to be redrawn. No less than eight full pages fell into this category, including eight of the half-size scenes which Breton disliked. Time was short. The view of the "Stone Prison at Philadelphia, 1728" was redrawn in reverse of its first position, so that its entrance incorrectly appeared on Third Street instead of Market as in the earlier impressions. The Pegg’s Run plate was less carefully recopied from Watson’s sketch. Many other changes in details appeared, including the addition on some plates of attribution to Breton and the firm of Kennedy & Lucas.

During this same period Breton had been working on another commercial order of a completely different kind. In 1830, Thomas Earle had published in Philadelphia his treatise *Rail-Roads and Internal Communications*, for which Breton had drawn the illustrations. The book was a practical one, drawing on English sources since there was as yet no powered road in America. Breton’s work was routine lithography, but it interested him in the subject and led to a more important project a few years later. For the frontispiece, six different portions of railroad cars and locomotives were drawn. There were two other plates, the second devoted to the details of inclined plane construction. Whether these were the plans used in the inclined plane soon to be completed from the end of the Columbia

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52 These are in Dreer MS *Annals*.

53 On June 28, 1830, Watson reported to the publishers, Carey & Hart: "The stone that was broken is nearly finished—no delay will therefore follow from it." HSP. Publication took place about July 15.

54 The following *Annals* illustrations will be found both with and without attribution to Breton (page numbers in parentheses refer to facing pages in the 1830 edition): "Penny Pot Tavern & Landing and Griscom’s Academy." (139); "Slate Roof House—Residence of W. Penn, 1700." (151); "Arch Street Bridge, at Front Street" and "Friends’ Bank Meeting" (one plate) (335); "Shippen’s House, So. Second Street." and “First Christ Church, Philad.” (one plate) (315); “Residence of Washington in High Street, Philad.” and “British, Barracks, Philadelphia” (one plate) (361); “Office of Foreign Affairs, Philad. 1780” (also titled "Office for Foreign Affairs at Philadelphia 1780.") and "Letitia House" (one plate) (145). Apparently, the plate including “Clark’s Inn &c. facing the State-House.” and "Bridge, & Benezett’s House in Chesnut Street" (317) is the only one always to show attribution to Breton.
Railroad Bridge, and depicted by Wild in 1838, is not known. Of course, Breton may simply have copied his plates from an English source in Earle's possession.

Still another magazine opportunity came in 1830, but here Breton failed to establish a fruitful business relationship as he had with The Casket. In November, there appeared the first number of a periodical destined to achieve great popularity—L. A. Godey's Lady's Book. That first issue carried a Breton lithograph, a black and white print of Comlyville near Frankford. Although the lithograph is unsigned, it definitely appears to be Breton's. Jackson had no doubt of this,\(^\text{55}\) and the attribution to Kennedy & Lucas provides another clue. Yet, no other work of Breton's ever appeared in the Lady's Book.

By late summer, Watson's Annals had come on the market through the firms of Carey & Hart in Philadelphia, and G & C & H Carvill in New York. Of its twenty-four octavo plates, the four topical engravings were probably Breton's, and sixteen lithographic pages were clearly so.\(^\text{56}\) These last included one consisting of two half-size scenes of New York drawn to illustrate a small part of the book devoted to that city. Breton must have visited New York to make these drawings and must have taken time to sketch a few other local scenes while there. In the December, 1829, issue of The Casket a wood engraving had appeared, produced from his water color of Castle Garden and described in the text as "a striking view of this famous pleasure ground."

The other fifteen plates carried ten full-page and ten half-page Breton lithographs. Their style enhances the atmosphere of times past, and the use of a soft handmade paper contributes to the desired effect. The many dots and thin lines must have involved tremendous effort in drawing the small pictures particularly, since the soap-and-lampblack lithographic pencil dulled very quickly. Little light and shadow contrast appears, and the over-all impression is weak. Still, the often lifeless scenes are relieved by a horse outside a smith's shop,

\(^{55}\) Jackson, Iconography of Philadelphia, 16. The print is about \(8\frac{3}{4}'' \times 5''\). Lady's Book (November, 1830), facing p. 225.

\(^{56}\) The Annals contained four other engravings in portrait form, which appear to be the work of one much more experienced than Breton with the engraving process; moreover, even the engraved views are probably not from the same hand.
or a sailboat on the Delaware, or even by boys swimming in Dock Creek, with their clothing piled on the shore. For seven of the pictures the water colors are extant, and in each case demonstrate that the print was a faithful copy of the original drawing. Variants of the twelve redrawn pictures appeared among the published copies, but the prints in all copies were reproduced in black and white only. The colored sets sometimes seen today are the product of later hands.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, to a degree, the "primitive" approach taken in the *Annals* lithographs was intentional. The gray effect contrasts strongly with the sharpness of some of Breton's church lithographs of the year before. The figures are always in the dress of an earlier day. Watson himself contributed to the impression by discarding many of Breton's drawings of extant buildings and including as the subjects of his twenty *Annals* lithographs no fewer than fifteen scenes which had disappeared. The four engraved scenes were also of this character.

In judging the pictures, another element must be credited to Breton. This was the first effort made in Philadelphia to look backward pictorially rather than simply to depict what the artist saw. To do this effectively, greater imagination and more skill in drawing were required. Yet it must not be thought that these street scenes were purely fanciful. Many of the buildings were relatively recent casualties, and descriptions of them, as well as numerous drawings made by Watson from memory, were available. Watson, moreover, had consulted persons of great merit as well as age, such as the venerable Charles Thomson. Pictures of the bridge which gave Arch Street its name and of the first Christ Church, demolished when the existing structure was built over and around it, powerfully stimulate the imagination, but have strong basis in fact.

With a firm start in both book and magazine illustration, and with his own series of views of Philadelphia churches on the market, only the field of the "trade card," or business advertisement, remained for Breton to exploit. This, too, he seems to have entered into before the *Annals* was published. His undated Philadelphia Baths

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57 In addition to "Stone Prison" and "Peg's Run," plates showing clear changes in the drawing are "Penn's Landing at Essex House, Chester."; "Drawbridge & Blue Anchor Inn."; "Arch Street Bridge, at Front Street."; "Friends' Bank Meeting"; and "Residence of Washington in High Street, Philada."
trade card probably appeared shortly after the baths, on the corner of Sansom and Seventh streets, were opened in 1828, and that for the City Hotel on Third Street, printed by Kennedy & Lucas, about 1830. Breton had every reason to believe he had laid a firm foundation for an outstanding career. He was a very early arrival on the local lithographic scene, he had a working relationship with the city's first lithographic firm, and was successful as an illustrator. Yet, while the momentum carried forward a few more years, his activity never passed beyond that of the years he had just completed.

That he had reached his peak was not apparent to Breton in 1831, although in that year only one of his drawings was published in The Casket—a view of the Frankford Arsenal, the woodcut for which was reused in Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post in 1832. The Casket had embarked upon a new policy of picturing scenes abroad, and Breton appears to have sold only nine other views to it in the six years between 1832 and 1837.

Breton was still drawing humble old buildings in Philadelphia, but in 1831 was primarily at work on a new combination of book illustrations and commercial subjects. A third edition of the first Philadelphia guidebook came on the market, and Breton had been commissioned for most of the plates. In 1811, Dr. James Mease had published his Picture of Philadelphia, Giving an Account of its Origin, Increase and Improvements in Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, Commerce and Revenue. This had already gone through a second edition before Thomas Porter, after Mease's death, decided to reissue it with his own supplemental volume bringing the original data up to date. The first and second editions had been illustrated with a single copper engraving of Thomas Birch's view of the water front, but for the expanded reissue Breton contributed seven lithographs, ranging in size up to 4" x 6". Because the size of the volumes was kept small for easy carrying and handling, this was the maximum print size possible. His subjects ran the gamut of business activity:

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58 Illustrated in Wainwright, 27. For descriptions, see ibid., 116 and 183.
60 The first of these, "Naval Asylum, Philadelphia," appeared in December, 1832, facing p. 553. For the others, see Notes 71, 72, and 73 below.
61 "In Trotter's Alley—S. 2d Str.—taken in 1831—partly demolished 1834" (5½" x 4½"), HSP.
Bowlby & Weaver's Market Street hardware store; Dawson's brewery at Tenth and Filbert streets; the Citizen's Line of steamboats to New York; an alliterative "Marble Mantel Manufactory"; the Dyott glass works in Kensington; and the Wetherill paint factory. Other artists also made engravings for the new second volume, and the use of varying types of plates recalled the *Annals*. Only three of the lithographs bear Breton's name, but the authorship of all is clear from the style employed. The retainer was probably secured through his friends at Kennedy & Lucas, which printed the lithographic plates.

While Breton had received no personal acclaim for his work in the *Annals*—in those days the illustrator was seldom identified—there was praise for his drawings. The *Saturday Bulletin*, for example, said on August 28, 1830:

The pictures in the book add materially to its interest—views of old houses and localities now forgotten or defaced. . . . There are some pictures of buildings still standing, such as the London Coffee House, now a shoe store at the s. w. corner of Market and Front Streets—the Slate House, nearly opposite the Coffee House. . . . There is a good picture too of the first Christ Church—very primitive in its appearance, with the bell hung on a crotch of a tree; another of the bridge across Chestnut Street opposite the present post office where Dock Creek ascended, and was navigated to that spot and even higher by boats.

This kind of comment, as well as that from readers, unquestionably encouraged Watson, who had further book projects in mind, with Breton as their illustrator. More material on New York's beginnings had been assembled in manuscript, and in 1832, *Historic Tales of Olden Time in New York*, a small pocket volume, was published. Breton's two small scenes of New York which had appeared in the *Annals* were redrawn in slightly smaller size, but all the remaining pictures were new compositions. In general, the *Annals* approach was repeated: Penn's arrival was now paralleled by "The arrival of Captain Hudson at Sandy Hook" in 1609, one of a number of scenes which were imaginary. In other cases, earlier pictures by other artists were copied. Only one scene might have been drawn from nature, that of the Erie Canal.62

62 It seems probable that Breton traveled through parts of New York State. In May, 1828, *The Casket* published (facing p. 217) an unsigned view, "Travelling on the Erie Canal," which Breton later made into the lithograph mentioned. This view has not been found elsewhere.
As a companion to the 1832 New York volume, Watson issued in Philadelphia in 1833 *Historic Tales of the Olden Time*. Many of its subjects were identical with those in the *Annals*. But Breton's illustrations must already have been wiped from the stones, for he now created new ones of Penn's landing at Dock Creek, the Letitia House, the Slate Roof House, and the scene of the Old Court House and Friends' Meeting. While these substantially duplicated his earlier work, the book also contained a few new and experimental illustrations. Breton copied into one small lithograph the Penn treaty scene of Benjamin West (already copied by many others in England and America), and into another a drawing of the Treaty Tree. For the frontispiece, it was presumably he who essayed a portrait of Penn on stone. If so, then, although Watson accepted the drawing for publication, Breton drew rebuke anonymously from another quarter. One reviewer of the book commented:

We could have wished that the great legislator and first settler of this State had been displayed in the frontispiece of the work before us, with features a little nearer those of the human face divine. He is made to look as if he were under the influence of some dire visitation—apoplectic seizure, or evil spirit. This is an affair however of the artist, with which the author has nothing to do.  

Being unable to agree with the last point, Watson later wrote beneath the news clipping, "The above portrait of Penn was replaced by a better one Engraved." Actually, the lithograph did not merit the comment it received.

Though Breton's name nowhere appears in *Historic Tales*, or on its plates, again his authorship is apparent, not only from the style employed, but particularly from the last of the new pictures, "The State House 1778." The water color for this plate is extant, titled in Breton's script, "The State House in 1778—from a Drawing of that date by C W Peale—corrected by W L Breton." His water colors were still being painted in the size earlier adopted of about 5" x 8". Presumably, the corrections were based on information from Watson's researches; the copying is a rather free rendition of Peale's

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63 Since lithographic stones had to be brought from Bavaria, it was the custom to erase the grease drawing and reuse the stone after the desired number of impressions had been printed.

64 See Dreer MS *Annals*, 61.

65 The water color (7\(\frac{3}{4}\)" x 5\(\frac{3}{4}\)") is in HSP.
drawing as engraved by Trenchard and published in 1787 in the *Columbian Magazine*.

It was hardly later than 1833 that a lithograph not part of any book appeared, which, while it contains no name of artist or lithographer, by its style can only have been the work of Breton. It is full of interest. “Railroad Depot at Philadelphia” shows the first Baldwin locomotive, *Old Ironsides*, standing before a building identified as the “Philadelphia Germantown & Norristown Railway Depot” at Ninth and Green streets in the city. Passengers fill the one visible car, which looks much like a stagecoach. The scene has that “primitive” touch and method of execution which, coupled with the date when it was produced, stamp it as Breton’s.

The key to attribution of the plate seems to rest with Watson, who at the time was a well-known citizen of Germantown, which had obtained the first railroad for Philadelphia because it wanted to be linked with the city. The first run was made with horses in June, 1832, with a band aboard and with speeches and a procession in Germantown. It cannot be doubted that this signal accomplishment involved Watson, who in 1847 became an officer of the railroad company. Whether or not Watson knew of Breton’s 1830 railroad plates—and he must have—it was probably he who suggested recording the first run when the new steam engine was used. The great event occurred on November 23, 1832, and we can readily imagine Breton sketching in the crowd as the train arrived from Germantown:

While the road and the cars were a novelty which excited curiosity, the locomotive was a prodigy and wonder, so much so that the President of the company, in his anxiety lest some fatal accident might occur, usually passed up and down with the train, and in this case he said that on approaching the city, and looking forward, Ninth Street from Poplar to Green, appeared to be black from side to side with the dense mass of people gathered there to witness the action of the novel motive power.

Although there was nothing visibly antiquarian about this public event, for both Watson and Breton it was undoubtedly fraught with a sense of the “passing of the old” and so deserved being recorded.

66 Illustrated in Wainwright, 3, and described, 191. Only one Breton water color has been traced to this year: “W L Breton. SE. Corners of Arch & Second Streets (1833).” (6½" x 4½"), HSP.

The year 1835 saw Breton produce at least a dozen drawings of curious buildings and old corners near the Delaware, in the most ancient part of Philadelphia still standing. This burst of activity could have been spontaneous, but more likely it was again sparked by Watson, who still kept a manuscript book of items which might be published. On one occasion he wrote, "I observe, in 1834/5 that the houses in Philada. are being made too high for comfort, convenience, or even interest . . . "; an undated memorandum headed "List of Old Houses—to be drawn by W. L. Breton" is probably of this same period. Many of the listings pique the curiosity, such as "No. 23 and 25 Water Street two houses very narrow a 2d and 3d story brick"; "47 and 49 South 2d—two little houses—strange looking and out of line of st."; "10 and 12 Strawberry Alley—an old queer frame 2d story (Eaves)"; and "73 Arch St.—2d story brick—has coat of arms on it." None of Breton's 1835 drawings have been linked definitely to these descriptions, but they depict the same type of structure whose curious angles and construction appealed to the trained eye, and they were in the same neighborhood.

In the summer of 1835 came a trip to Easton, and drawings of the canal and locks there appeared as woodcuts in The Casket from November of that year through January, 1836, and again in March, 1837. Coupled with the first of these was a Breton view of the canal locks at Manayunk, possibly drawn especially to go with the Easton

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68 All these are at HSP: "W. L. Breton Drawbridge Wharf, &c. (1835)." (73/" x 5¾") ; "Second Street & Little Dock. (1835)." (73/" x 4½") ; "W L Breton. Little Dock & Spruce Streets (1835)" (6¾" x 5¾") ; "W L Breton. Corner of Seventh & Button-Wood Streets—at present (1835) nearly surrounded by modern Buildings." (8½" x 6½") ; "N. W. & S. E. Corners of Race, Front, & Water Street. (1835)" etc. (8½" x 5½") ; "W L Breton. East side of Water Street, 3 Doors North of Chesnut. (1835)." (6¾" x 5½") ; "Breton. East side of Water Street, 3 Doors above Chesn* (1835). from the Alley leading to the River." (5" x 6½") ; "North side of Race Street—near Third—1835." (5½" x 5¾") ; "Third near Race, West side—being the only remaining House (Oct 1835) of a Row of one Story Houses formerly known as Hell Town." (4½" x 4½") ; "98 Race Street, near Second—South side—Oct. 1835." (3½" x 4½") ; "Breton 1835. Remains of Houses at Francis Ville, destroyed by the British Army when quartered in Philadelphia" (8½" x 5½") ; and another copy "drawn on the Spot, 30 June 1835, by W L Breton," titled in another hand "Ruin Francisville" etc. (7½" x 4½") . Probably from the same year are two street scenes, titled in another hand "Water Street East Side near Race Street" (5½" x 6½") and "South Side of arch Street & the adjoining buildings at the Wharf" (7½" x 4½") , both at HSP. See also photocopy at Free Library of Philadelphia, titled in another hand "St. Johns Church and Grounds, N. E. View, Mulberry Alley & 5th Sts."

69 Dreer MS Annals, 95.

70 At HSP.
Canals were still a progressive form of internal improvement and, as such, good magazine copy, but they had to share space in the May, 1836, issue with two of Breton’s views of the new Columbia Railroad Bridge leading to the famous inclined plane. This, the first railroad bridge in America, had been opened just two years earlier.

During the winter of 1836, Breton took what appears to have been his longest trip west, commissioned by the builders of a new resort hotel in Beaver City, northwest of Pittsburgh. Two published views resulted. In the September, 1837, issue of The Casket his “New Brighton Hotel—Beaver City, Pennsylvania” appeared as a woodcut, “taken from an original drawing made for it when commenced last winter.” The frontispiece for October, “View of Brighton and Valley of Beaver River Taken from New Brighton,” was the only lithograph by Breton ever to appear in the magazine. He should have brought home a folio of western Pennsylvania drawings, but nothing of the kind has been found.

By 1833, the firm of Kennedy & Lucas, with which Breton had close ties, had dissolved following Lucas’ death. Breton wisely made a connection with another lithographic firm, Lehman & Duval, which had been formed late in 1834. This was the house which printed his large trade card for Rudman’s Brewery in the Northern Liberties (about 1835) and his smaller one for the Egner Wine and Liquor Store at Third and Market streets (about 1837). It also printed his lithograph “View of Brighton.” Naturally, Breton turned to Lehman & Duval when his antiquarian instincts were aroused in another, and an important, “passing of the old.”

In the Annals Breton had depicted the Old Court House in the middle of Market Street. Built in the early days of the colony, 1707, it was venerable, but had outgrown its usefulness. It had served the dual functions of a town hall on its second floor and of the town market beneath the arches at street level. Now it was too small,


72 “View of the Columbia Rail-Road Bridge, over the Schuylkill, near Philadelphia.” and “Another View of” the same, both May, 1836, facing p. 265.

73 See September, 1837, facing p. 421, and October, facing p. 433.

74 Described in Wainwright, 240, listings 460 and 462.
and expansion of the city had taken its functions elsewhere. Down it came, but not before Breton had portrayed it in a lithograph as it still stood in 1837. But this was not enough. When on April 7 workmen clambered to the rooftree to commence its removal, he drew the old structure again in the process of demolition. His “before and after” approach must have appealed to his new printers, for they published both scenes. The era of conscious preservation, or indeed even any thought in that direction, was yet far away, and Breton was the first artist to use his backward glance in recording such an incident.

Only three months later, the mood and the event were completely reversed as the artist continued his record with seeming impartiality. July 18, 1837, was the date of the launching of the new frigate Pennsylvania from the Navy Yard, then on the Delaware in Southwark, between Prime and Wharton streets. It was a gala event. The streets, the river, and the buildings of the Navy Yard were thronged, and Breton was among the crowd. His water color shows an animated scene. It is much larger than any of his known water colors (about 25” x 18”), and appealingly conveys the curiosity and the excitement in the air at the “coming of the new.” Breton sold the finished picture in February, 1838.

His success with this painting brought him a commission to visit New York to draw a somewhat similar event. The first steamship in trans-Atlantic service, the Great Western, had completed her maiden voyage from England in April, 1838, after a fifteen-day crossing. She caused a sensation. Two hundred thirty-six feet over-all, with paddle wheels twenty-eight feet high, on May 7 she put out to sea from the Battery on her return voyage, amid the wildest excitement. “All the city went to behold the sight. The Battery was a mass of living witnesses of this event. Castle Garden was thronged, and the shipping was ornamented by flags.” Breton was on hand, and on May 26, 1838, the Philadelphia Public Ledger described his print:

GREAT ATTRACTION

A splendid view of the Departure of the Steam Ship Great Western, from New York, has just been completed for Head Quarters, Franklin Place, and now forms a striking addition to this well known and popular resort. The

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75 Illustrated in Wainwright, 36, and described, 170 and 197.
76 At HSP.
77 Rodman Gilder, The Battery (Boston, 1936), 169.
view was taken from the Battery, by Mr. W. L. Breton, expressly for this establishment at the precise moment of her departure, amid the fleet of accompanying steam and sail boats, the shipping and the immense assemblage, which rendered it one of the most magnificent scenes ever witnessed.

Head Quarters was a place of public resort just off Chestnut Street in an area now being excavated for Franklin artifacts, and was operated by one Charles Alexander with whom Breton must have been friendly. Here Breton arranged to have many of his pictures displayed. The newspaper item continued:

This drawing, in connection with the Ship Pennsylania and other beautiful views, by the same artist, and the large collection of splendid Paintings and Engravings which adorn the Rooms, together with the recent renovation and improvement, the great variety of newspapers from all parts of the United States and Canada, and the strict order maintained throughout the premises, will render "Head Quarters" the most agreeable resort for citizens and strangers in this or any other city in the Union.

With his Great Western and Pennsylvania views heading the list, but with many other “beautiful views” on exhibition at Franklin Place, Breton appears to have reached the end of his creativity.

The Casket was stumbling. In January, 1838 its format was changed so that henceforth few pictures appeared in it. Its wood blocks of earlier illustrations had already been sold. Breton’s scene of the canal locks at Manayunk appeared in the 1838 Hoch-Deutsche Germantaun Calendar; his United States Naval Asylum, presented in the December, 1832, issue of The Casket, became the frontispiece of Daniel Bowen’s A History of Philadelphia, published in 1839. Other Breton scenes were reproduced in newspaper form. When, in 1839, The Casket expired by merger into Graham’s Magazine, Breton was listed as a “teacher of drawing” living at 54 North Sixth Street.

Breton’s friendship with Watson continued, but the second edition of the Annals, in 1842, brought no commission to redraw the lithographs. It was not that Breton’s views were unworthy, but they had long since been wiped from the stones. Moreover, as Bowen had said, the value of using wood engravings which could be printed with

78 Walter C. Brenner, “Philadelphia Inns and Taverns, 1680–1850” (Philadelphia, 1928), typescript, HSP.
79 Washington Inn, Loxley’s House, the Canal Basin at Easton, and probably other scenes were reissued in The National Atlas and Tuesday Morning Mail.
the letter press had become clear. Breton had the satisfaction of seeing all his first edition lithographs carefully copied on wood, if only in the small size he had disliked. His pictures lived on in every later edition of the *Annals*, but only as reproductions made by others. His own work appeared only in the scarcest of the issues.

Then, too, the firm of Lehman & Duval had come to an end in 1837 when Lehman withdrew. In or about 1841, Breton seems to have had some arrangement with the lithographic printer Thomas Sinclair, but this was not fruitful. Sinclair had a penchant for the old, and reproduced at least one of Birch's *Views of Philadelphia* as a lithograph. He also published what appears to have been Breton's lithograph of the Friends' Almshouse, made when the building was being taken down in 1841 from the site on Walnut Street it had occupied since 1745. 80

In August, 1842, the antiquarian John McAllister wrote to Watson: "I had your Note for Mr. Breton sent to him—his residence is, I believe, the American Hotel, 6th St. opposite Minor St." 81 Breton was now about seventy and may have been in semi-retirement. In 1849 he was again listed in the city directory, this time at Fourth and Walnut streets, but without indication whether this was a business or residence address. He was still hale at eighty-two, as a letter of Watson's in the spring of 1855 indicates:

Mr. Britten [sic] told me he had engaged himself a residence in Rising Sun Village—so perhaps in or near NiceTown—He was seeking one in Germt.—He rents the house and boards with his tenants.—I suppose he has all the houses and places, you ask about, already drawn—especially that of the Monastery.—We should be glad to see him at my house in Germt.—He had a good one of the rocks near Rittenhouse P[aper] mill . . .

PS I suppose, you would hear of Britton by asking at Stage office—he should use it, I suppose. 82

Breton's death on August 14, 1855, 83 cut off these arrangements after only a few months, but even at the end he was practicing his

80 Print described in Wainwright, 139, listing 141. Two other Breton water colors of this building were made quite early: "Front view of the Friends Alms-Houses in Walnut Street—taken in 1828." (7½" x 5½"), HSP, and "Alms House in Walnut Street. (taken in 1828)" (7¾" x 5¾"), Athenaeum.
81 McAllister to Watson, Aug. 9, 1842, HSP.
82 Watson to Horatio G. Jones, Jr., Apr. 20, [1855], HSP.
83 Germantown Telegraph, Aug. 22, 1855.
art to some extent. Among his personal effects were "23 Fair Pictures and Frames," drawing papers, paints, and unfinished pictures.\(^{84}\)

Breton was the first consistent delineator of the Philadelphia scene after the Birches. William Birch's last ten years were Breton's first ten in Philadelphia. Birch has always held a towering position in the iconography of the city; Breton, an obscure one. A comparison of the two men and their local work sharpens the contrast between them.

Both came to the United States from England relatively late in life, Birch in his forties, Breton in his fifties. But here any similarity ends. Birch had been formally trained in the fine arts; Breton came without either training or experience. Birch depicted only what was new in the city; Breton felt the impact of the old and the historical. Birch made colorplate books of his views. Despite publication of Childs' *Views of Philadelphia* from 1827 to 1830 and those of Wild in 1838, Breton was content to leave his record in water colors and wash drawings and in illustrations for the books of others. Birch saw vitality in public buildings and imposing sites; Breton sought out curious old houses and humble scenes. While Birch's range of subject matter was perhaps the more catholic, Breton was strongly influenced in favor of churches, bridges, and water scenes. Birch loved the animation of street life; except for his 1825 drawing, Breton consciously avoided it. Birch drew only what he saw, while Breton's were the first Philadelphia scenes produced in retrospect—although he, too, pictured many contemporary views. Birch's prints have lived through the years in handsome folio volumes; Breton's water colors suffered the usual dispersal and his prints, hidden in books, were in most cases so small as to escape notice.

Breton should not be viewed as an imitator of style, but as a strong innovator, the first in a long line of kindred interpreters of the Philadelphia scene, artists like Kennedy, Pennell, Taylor, McIntyre and Pullinger, for whom every facet of city life was worth recording. Breton, "the constitutional grumbler" but the man of "intelligence and education,"\(^{85}\) the man with "a mystery about him," contributed importantly to the pictorial record of Philadelphia. In the broad view, Harry T. Peters saw him as "a clever designer for engravers\(^{84}\) Register of Wills, Philadelphia Co., Adm. No. 309 (1855).
\(^{85}\) Hagner, 90.
who also lithographed on stone for various Philadelphia houses.”

Locally, Jackson evaluated him as “not a great artist, but a most useful and sympathetic one to have appeared at the time he did,” and Boies Penrose as “another surprisingly good water colorist . . ., better known as an artist for various lithographers; his 50 drawings of Philadelphia buildings are accurate and full of spirit.”

Breton’s original drawings are clearly his best productions, but being one-of-a-kind, they have not come to the attention of the general public. Interest in them has recently increased, however, with the restoration of the area between Independence Hall and the Delaware River being undertaken by the federal and state governments. Here was the locale of most of the everyday scenes Breton recorded and the building portraits he made. They deserve to be better known. It seems certain, since Breton was a prolific worker in his active professional span of ten years, that more of his drawings will in time come to light.

Villanova

Martin P. Snyder