NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Glimpses of Napoleon in 1804

When Nicholas Biddle sailed from New York on September 4, 1804, as secretary to General John Armstrong, Jr., the newly appointed Minister to France, he was mindful of family instructions to keep diaries or journals of his experiences and impressions of Europe. However, until recently only one of his foreign diaries has been located for his three years abroad. That diary, long on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, covers the first half of his journey to Greece. It begins on March 28, 1806, when he sailed from Naples, and ends in Athens on June 6 with a mention of his next notebook which would carry on the story. In 1917, when William Nickerson Bates wrote his pamphlet Nicholas Biddle's Journey to Greece in 1806, Bates commented that although the next notebook was missing it was believed to be still in existence.

Now, sixty years later, Dr. Bates' statement has been proved correct. A few months ago a mass of Nicholas Biddle's papers was discovered stored in trunks in the loft of an outbuilding at Andalusia, the country estate where Biddle died in 1844. Among these manuscripts, many of them of considerable interest, were fourteen of his foreign diaries. They start with the day his ship left the Battery in New York Harbor, carry through the voyage, and take the diarist to Paris. They cover much of his travels throughout France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Poland, Holland and include the missing Greek diary. An account of his extensive travels in Italy is missing, and only one volume represents his visit to England. Probably a number of the notebooks Biddle filled with his European adventures are yet to be uncovered. The material which follows is drawn entirely from several of the newly discovered volumes and is here reproduced with the kind permission of James Biddle.

Arriving in Paris on November 7, 1804, Nicholas Biddle dined in style the following day at the Palais Royale. The company included
the commissioners James Monroe and Robert R. Livingston, who had been negotiating the Louisiana Purchase, General Armstrong, and Tadeusz Kosciuszko, in Biddle’s French “un homme avancé en age avec de cheveux trop long de derriere et d’un apparence point du tout remarkable ou militaire.” Also present was the Marquis de Lafayette and several others.

While Biddle was talking to one of the guests, Lafayette came up to him and inquired “do you talk French Mr. Biddle?” “Un peu,” answered Biddle. “Parlez un peu, replied he. . . . You speak English perfectly well do you not sir, said I. He said that he did once but it was so long since he left America and he was so young when he was there that he had forgotten it.” After some further conversation, Lafayette asked Biddle’s age. “I blushed when I told him I had not yet reached my nineteenth year.” The evening was a memorable one for the Philadelphian since it established a lasting friendship with Lafayette, whose American banker he was to become, and because it brought him also to the favorable attention of Monroe. It was President Monroe who was to introduce Biddle to banking by appointing him a director of the Bank of the United States.

Soon after this dinner, Biddle, an admirer of Napoleon, found an opportunity of seeing the great man. His first sight of the Emperor was at a military review, the next in Notre Dame at Napoleon’s coronation, a sight Biddle never forgot. More than thirty years later, he recalled in a speech before the Alumni Association of Nassau Hall: “I do remember, too, to have stood by the great master spirit of our age on the day when he was crowned Emperor.”

*The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*

NICHOLAS B. WAINWRIGHT

*November 18, 1804* While the impression is yet fresh in my memory I sit down to record one of the most splendid spectacles which I have yet seen. About 10 o’clock this morning the General rose from breakfast & went to Mr. Livingston’s thence to go to his private audience with the Emperor. After he had gone, knowing that there was to be a monthly review of the troops, I walked to the
garden of the Tuilleries in order to get a sight of it. I found however
that it was to be in the Place de Carousel, & I feared that I would
not be able to get in the Palace of the Tuilleries. Meeting however
Mr. Holmes an American gentleman of my acquaintance, he went
to one of the iron gates, & by his conversation with the porter as
well as the 5 franc piece which I gave to him I got admittance into
one of the antichambers of the apartment of General Duroc. Holmes
returned to our house to bring Mrs. Armstrong & Miss Livingston,
but after waiting for them some time I concluded they
had declined coming, & accordingly I seated myself, or rather stood
up in a chair near one of the windows. Col. Bentaloe stood by me &
my countrywoman Madam Rubel sat in the window. The appointed
hour to which the Emperor is generally very punctual is 12, but
something prevented his appearance until about ½ past one. From
about 11 therefore I stood there looking at the fine troops which
stood before me. There were about 12,000 fine looking men, horse
and foot, dressed in dresses extremely gay & dashing. The window
was the second from the large staircase of the Palace & fronting the
square. About the door of the Palace stood some fine horses richly
caparisoned, & with servants almost covered with lace. At half after
one the Emperor descended the staircase & mounted. I did not see
him get on his horse as it was too much to the left of the window.
The troops were disposed in ranks at equal distances from each
other, the foot in front, the horse in the rear. A wide space separated
the wings. The emperor as soon as he mounted rode in front of the
first rank of the left wing then rode along the right wing. I was about
the center, and as he returned I first saw Genl. Murat on a white
horse then several other officers, then came the Emperor followed
by other distinguished officers. I caught a hasty glance of him as
he passed along at an easy gallop. When he got to the end of the

1 General Duroc, Duc de Frioul, was one of Napoleon's closest associates. He was killed in
action at Wurtschen in 1813.
2 Presumably Paul Bentalou, a veteran of the American Revolution. He was evidently the
man Robert R. Livingston referred to as "Mr. Bentelow," in a letter to Monroe of April 10,
1803.
3 Showered with high honors by Napoleon, whose sister he married, Joachim Murat was
at this time Governor of Paris and was soon to become King of Naples. After the fall of
Napoleon, he was executed in 1815.
right wing, he returned along the second rank. As he got opposite
to my window a soldier stepped from the ranks to offer a petition.
He opened, read it, gave it to an officer nigh him & galloped on.
I lost him as he passed up the left wing, & saw him as he came down
again. In this manner he went along the foot, and leaving one
regiment unreviewed he went thro’ a gate to review the horse which
were separated from the foot by an iron railing. There he remained
a considerable time. He received several petitions, and was so much
concealed by the cavalry that I could see nothing of him. Having
reviewed the horse he returned thro’ the gate, and reviewed this
regiment which was Italian & was of course reviewed after the
French. He passed up the left wing in reviewing it, and returned
to the Palace door, & fixed himself there for the troops to pass by
him. He [stayed] before the door on horseback with his principal
generals on each side of him. Before me was General Rappan, an
exceedingly handsome young man, next to him was Caffarelli,
dressed in green coats & scarlet pantaloons & boots excessively rich,
next two officers whom I could not know, then General Berthier and
then Bonaparte. What a sight!! Not fifteen yards from me I beheld
"the man before whom the world had trembled," the hero whose
name has sounded in every quarter of the globe & who has rivaled
if not excelled all that antiquity can produce of hardy valour and
successful enterprise. I did not neglect this rare opportunity of
seeing so wonderful a man & for upwards of an hour while 12,000
men passed before him my eyes scarcely for a moment left him.
On the most majestic, the most elegant white horse I have ever
seen, who as he went along the ranks seemed to fly rather than to
walk, & who, as he now stood, seemed to regard with tranquil
delight the scene before him on a saddle most richly furnished, sat
the Emperor. In his dress he seems to have desired to distinguish
himself by simplicity. He had on a pair of white pantaloons, long

4 Biddle erred in the name of this young cavalry general. He was Gen. Jean Rapp (1772–
1821), a former aide-de-camp to Napoleon.
5 Gen. Francois Marie Auguste Caffarelli (1776–1848), Governor of the Tuilleries, was,
like Rapp, a former aide-de-camp to Napoleon. Earlier in the year he had been to Rome to
negotiate with the Pope about Napoleon's coronation.
6 Pierre Alexandre Berthier, Prince of Wagram and of Neufchatel (1753–1815), was one
of Napoleon's marshals.
boots coming over his knees, a plain blue coat, lined with red, two epaulets, and a plain blue cocked hat. He had a small riding whip in his hand. His hair is black & cut very short, he wears no whiskers. His face is somewhat long of a dark olive complexion, his eye hollow, but full of the expressive fire of genius, his nose long, & his nostrils somewhat distended & black with the profuse use of snuff. He is now fatter than he has been for some time. The profiles of reputation which I have seen resemble him very much. In this situation he sat while the troops passed. The dismounted horse, the Grenadiers, the mounted artillery, the light infantry, the Italians, the Cuirassiers, Bonharnois beautiful regiment of horse, etc all passed him. He seemed somewhat tired of the ceremony. Two or three times he picked his nose very impolitely with his fingers, he gaped, & stroked his face. As soon as the last line passed him he jumped from his horse and came into the Palace. It was about three o'clock & the officers of the different corps then waited on him. There was also a diplomatic audience. (General Mortier was on the side of Bonaparte and received his orders on foot which he then delivered. The Emperor spoke once in a low tone of voice. His voice is soft and mild. Twice Genl. Mortier laughed to Bonaparte on some occasion, but the Emperor did not smile.)

December 3, 1804. I was waked about 7 o'clock by the servant, and when I learnt the hour I was in despair for I was told I must be at the church by six. I made all possible haste sent for a carriage, none was to be found, set off on foot for Notre Dame. Arrived at the door I stood among epaulets & stars myself without sword or stiff collar & after about an hours standing, got in. I went to all parts of the church & at last found the seat designated by my ticket which was Tribune 9, second row of benches. But the second row was already occupied by ladies, and I therefore took the hind most seat of the Tribune. The coup de oie of the church is magnificent. The Corps Legislatif, the Tribunals, and the different public bodies took their different stations. It was about 8 when I

7 Edouard Mortier, duc de Trévise (1768–1835), was one of Napoleon's marshals.
entered the church & in about 2 hours the Bishops, the Cardinals, and the Pope appeared. He advanced towards his throne which was nearly opposite to me, and I now gazed at the successor of St. Peter. Being seated the Cardinals advanced & kissed his hand, the Bishops then advanced & on their knees kissed his knee or rather his robes under which both his hand & knee were concealed. The Pope is a hard featured man, if the extreme cold of the church did not contract his muscles more than ordinarily he is somewhere about 60 years of age & is said to be a good man. About an hour after the Emperor & Emperess came in. The Pope advanced to meet them, but as their place was on the same side of the gallery with myself I could not see them well. Here the ceremony of coronation was performed of which I saw little. By changing my position I however saw the Emperor before he was crowned in a very thoughtful position seated, bare, & surrounded with the Princes & great officers. The ceremony of coronation the Emperor walked to the other end of the church where was the throne & he took the oath. He then returned to the Pope to present to him the golden bread, and again returned to the throne. During these marches I saw very well. The Emperor was drest in a superb robe carried in his left hand a [word left out] & in his right the sceptre. His train was held by several great officers. Madame was also dressed elegantly & looked really handsome. Her long & fine train was supported by many of the great ladies. What a sight was this for a philosopher. A little second lieutenant now wielded the Bourbon sceptre, a woman now occupied the place of Antoinette. After this ceremony the band of music played te Deum, hymns were sung, and we at length took our departure. I made the most of my way to the Boulevards where I saw the splendid cortege. The Emperor’s carriage was very fine, the Pope’s was also superb, and preceded by a jackass on which rode one of the Cardinals. A great number of cavalry preceded & closed the cavalcade. The Boulevards were illuminated tho’ I could not admire them much being cold & hungry.

December 18, 1804 The fete [the celebration following the coronation] may now be considered as finished. These things generally make more noise abroad than at home, for myself I have seen very little gaiety. The people do not seem to enter into the spirit of the thing.
Conversations with Benjamin West

By the conclusion of his travels on the Continent in March 1807, when he sailed from Holland. Arriving at Gravesend, he journeyed on to London. There he had the good fortune to serve for some months as secretary to the American envoy James Monroe, through whom he met many interesting people including the sixty-nine-year-old American painter Benjamin West.

Wednesday, June 24, 1807—W [Robert Walsh] & myself went to Mr. West's. We looked at his paintings which we had both seen before & talked to the old man. He is really a good old man, fond of talking of himself & like all the distinguished men I have ever seen equally fond of flattery. He says that his King Lear is his best piece done in his greatest stile. The actors used to come & study it. He paints by candle light—immense industry. We were joined by Mr. Pinkney & went together to the Marquis of Stafford's collection. This is considered the finest in England. There are two pieces of Titian in the first room. They are of course fine. I suggested to Mr. West an observation which had occurred to me that the skies of Titian were the worst parts of his pictures. He said I was right for the ultra marine of his skies gets injured & looks bad. In the second room are the seven sacraments of Poussin, the finest of which is the gushing of the water from the rock—they are not

1 Robert Walsh (1784-1859), the American journalist, was at this time secretary in London to William Pinkney.

2 King Lear, painted in 1788, is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on deposit from the Boston Athenaeum. It was painted for J. J. Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in London. After Boydell's death, the contents of the Gallery were put up for auction and Lear was bought by Robert Fulton and brought to America. The Athenaeum acquired it in 1828.

3 William Pinkney (1764-1822), American diplomat, was at this time joint commissioner with James Monroe to treat with the British over reparations for ship seizures and impressment.

4 George Granville Leveson-Gower (1748-1822), second Marquis of Stafford, later first Duke of Sutherland, was "a leviathan of wealth," art collector, and one of the first owners of paintings in London who permitted the public access to his collection.

5 The Seven Sacraments, one of Poussin's most solemn achievements, were brought to England in 1792 by the Due d'Orléans. They are now in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, on deposit from the Earl of Ellesmere.
placed in a very good light. In the third room what pleased me most were a holy family of Annibale Carracci, & another of Correggio, as also a landscape by Claude. The large room is distinguished by three holy families by Raphael, one of which is peculiarly excellent. West is of opinion that he is the greatest painter, & in this he agrees with most artists. His transfiguration the greatest performance. I mentioned its alleged want of unity which may seem to detract from its effect. He thought it sufficiently attentive to unity tho' much he observed was to be said on the subject. Here is also a fine head of Guido. In the next room is a marine piece by Turner an English artist which West says is the best piece in the whole gallery. He was a promising artist but has fallen off much. He is said to have taken his subject from Vander-velde who is himself an admirable marine painter, better than Vernet says West. In the other room are several of the Dutch school. Among others one of Teniers on which West expatiated, instituted a comparison between Teniers & Wilkie a living English painter, in which he observed that Teniers it is true paints agreeable & natural faces, faces representing every variety of sentiment; but you could perceive that these feelings do not come from the heart, whereas Wilkie's faces are expressive of feelings which evidently come from the bottom of the soul. This appears to be an unnecessary distinction, which amounts only to this, that Teniers painted Dutch nature & Wilkie English nature & that the former is much less animated & tumultuous than the latter, but it does not I think imply as Mr. West seems to think any inferiority on the part of Teniers. There are also some Ostades. Ostade says W is one of the best colorists. There are but Titian & Ostade for color. He says that Raphael's best Madonna is della Seggiola.
On another occasion, when I dined at Mr. Monroe's with West & Dr. Jenner,\textsuperscript{12} happening to sit next to the former I took occasion to question him on his art.

When he was a boy he had the passion for painting which was much encouraged by a Mr. William Henry a gunsmith near Lancaster (now dead) who might have made a great man.\textsuperscript{13} He once suggested to West the death of Socrates which they were reading together.\textsuperscript{14} Henry made one of his workmen stand up that West might design his fine nervous arm, & it was from this that W took the disposition to copy nature. His piece (the death of S.) is now at Lancaster, & according to Fulton & West's son, the composition is admirable. He was then about 13 or 14. About the same time he painted a sign still at Lancaster of a drove of oxen. I asked him about a bull's head that is on one of the streets of Phila, but he did not recollect it. When at school he would always be occupied in drawing. His father (this is what Pinkney says from West) disliked his devoting himself to the art but some of the old Quakers spoke to him & represented that this talent was a gift from God whose will was not to be contradicted & therefore his son should be permitted to follow his genius. When I went to Rome said West to me, such was the effect which a sudden passage from a little town on the Delaware to the mistress of the world & such the enthusiasm for his art that his mind was overwhelmed by it. After six weeks of anxious days & sleepless nights, he was obliged to go to Leghorn out of the reach of the arts to recover from his enthusiasm. After his mind had become tranquil, he again returned to Rome, but the ardor of his mind instead of being diminished became greater by enjoyment and after seven months, he was obliged again to leave Rome and abstain from study. What is still more surprising, he was forced to leave it a third time.

The Romans as a school are certainly first. The Bologna people

\textsuperscript{12} The famous Dr. Edward Jenner (1749-1823), discoverer of vaccination.
\textsuperscript{13} West's portrait of William Henry (1729-1786), and also that of Mrs. Henry, painted about 1755, were presented by descendants of the Henrys to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1902.
\textsuperscript{14} West's \textit{Death of Socrates}, painted c. 1756, and still surviving in private hands, was based on the frontispiece to the fourth volume of Charles Rollin's \textit{Ancient History of the Egyptians ... and Grecians} (London, 1738-1740). Ann C. van Devanter, "Benjamin West's \textit{Death of Socrates}," \textit{Antiques}, CIV (1973), 437-439; John Dillenberger, \textit{Benjamin West} (San Antonio, 1977), 9, 13, 89.
are next in point of character & force, indeed if the works of the Bologna painters the Carracci etc were taken from Rome much would be lost. I asked his opinion of Reubens & was glad to hear him confirm an idea which I have always had that in point of fire force genius Reubens is as great as any painter ever was. It is true that the design of his figures is not always good & his females were taken from the Flemish faces around him. I mentioned that Guido Reni was the painter who had injured less his reputation than any other. He says that Guido is a very unequal painter. His extravagancies brought him into distress & he painted for money. Therefore to judge of him one must see a piece done from his heart, some of his Ecce homo's or Magdalens for there are some Guidos much inferior to others. I objected to the introduction of Gods & Angels in pictures & cited Raphael & Angelo's God in the Vatican. He said it was drawn from the practice of the ancients who introduced Jupiter & sanctioned by the love of imagery prevalent in the Catholic church. I observed that it did not justify the practice, the heathen Jupiter & the Christian God are totally different, the former with passions intrigues & vices, the latter perfect abstracted pure. Of his moral qualities we may form some idea by abstracting & purifying every good quality of human nature, but to represent him physically as you have no other guide but the human figure, the best you can do is to make him a handsome man. He agreed it was incorrect.

Vasari was no great painter, but his lives are invaluable treasures. Mengs & Winkelman were at Rome when West was. Of Winkelman, West thinks less now than he used to do. I asked if he believed to be true what was often said, that the best part of Winkelman's book was made by Mengs. He believed it was. Winkelman used to stick very close to Mengs. Mengs was a good painter. His pieces in the Vatican are his best, but there are some good ones in Spain.

15 Giorgio Vasari, the Elder, author of The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects (Florence, 1550); title here given in translated form.
16 Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), active in Dresden, Rome, and Madrid, painter of portraits and religious and classical subjects. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), author of Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks (London, 1765). Mengs and Winckelmann were the dominant figures in the art world of Rome at the time of West's arrival there in 1760.
Velasquez was a good painter—very few of his works in England—
he formed his taste on Raphael’s pictures in the Escorial—he &
Murillo certainly the best of Spain.\footnote{West’s taste and knowledge of painting are surprising. Neither Velasquez nor Murillo were well known in England until after the Peninsular War, when examples of their work found their way to England.}

None of the Neapolitan painters have much genius, except Rosa—
but Lanfranc, Jordano etc are not extraordinary.\footnote{Salvator Rosa (Naples, 1615-1673); Giovanni Lanfranco (Parma and Rome, 1581–1647); Luca Giordano (Naples, 1632-1705). These celebrated painters of the Italian baroque style were out of fashion in 1807.}

In a century America will be above all the world in the arts.
The people there have a genius for the arts. At school the boys
are during their leisure hours drawing figures etc. This he has seen
in Italy but never in England.

I asked him if England would ever be famous for arts. In the
higher department he says they will not. Most English painters are
obliged to earn their subsistence so that before they reach the
summit of their art they are wholly occupied in portrait painting &
pleasing the people, so that they paint chiefly from common nature.
He would himself have been reduced to the same necessity had it
not been for the private patronage of the King, his public profits
not being enough.

The King is fond of the arts, & thinks they should be encouraged
from their bearing on manufactures, the art of design furnishing
models for workmanship. It is to the King that England owes all
she has in the arts.

On another occasion when he called on me he spoke of the taste
of Phila. which he said would be much superior in the arts to New
York which is too mercantile. It was he who induced Preston to
give his valuable library to Phila. Payne, the bookseller who West
employed to arrange it said that such a library had never passed
tho’ his hands.\footnote{The Rev. Samuel Preston bequeathed his library to the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1803. There were at that time several London booksellers by the name of Payne.}

Hope’s (old) collection of Dutch painters good, but the rest are
not of any consequence, scarcely one says West being the production
of the person whose name is affixed to it.\footnote{Henry Hope, the banker.}
Agreed with me about Elgin, a sad barbarian who collected merely to sell & whose boxes are now lying in some corner of London.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin (1766–1841), removed from the Parthenon in Athens portions of its frieze and other carvings in 1801—the "Elgin Marbles"—and in 1816 sold them to the British nation.