BOOK REVIEWS


Despite the handicaps placed upon it in recent years by pinch-penny federal and state government actions, historic preservation is still very much alive in Pennsylvania as well as in many other areas, and Philadelphia Preserved is both an inspiration and a very useful tool in this respect.

This massive catalogue of the Historic American Buildings Survey of Philadelphia is a model for future publications on such efforts, containing as it does a great deal of information on many of the more important structures which are included. These are records of both success and failure: structures preserved or restored; compromise settlements; and defeats saved by measurements, drawings, and other information gathered before the onset of the dreaded wrecking ball.

First edition material is unchanged, but it is updated by 123 additional sites, taking up forty more pages, and the book is improved by the addition of a street index, which makes it a virtual guidebook to Philadelphia preservation. The catalogue is arranged by districts: Society Hill, the Old City, Center Square, South Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Fairmount Park, Northwest Philadelphia, and the Delaware River Corridor.

A further advantage of the new edition is its being offered not only in the rather expensive cloth binding, but in paperback, making it more readily acceptable to those of modest means.

Pittsburgh

George Swetnam


Linton Park's Flax Scutching Bee at Marion Center at the Na-
tional Gallery of Art in Washington is one of the best-known of American folk paintings; its bright colors, lively composition, and energetic figures have a vigor admired by the art historian, while the directness and simplicity with which it recreates an annual — and perhaps otherwise unrecorded — event of American pioneer life explain its fascination for historians of our national culture. J. Neal Griffith's modest book sets out to tell us about the painter of the *Flax Scutching Bee*, but unfortunately there is little to tell. Park seems to have had no artistic training; he was employed as a house and sign painter and may even have helped give the dome of the National Capitol in Washington its final coat of white paint. There seem to be only eleven surviving works by the artist, all of which are reproduced in Griffith's book, but one of these is a modest watercolor made for his niece's autograph album and another has been ruined by poor restoration. Did he really paint so little, or are his paintings largely lost? Two of the works are signed but none is dated, rendering the development of a chronology impossible; he probably only began to paint in oils in the 1880s, when the earliest references to his works are known. Even the family anecdotes recorded by Griffith — the painter's great-great-nephew — tell us little about Linton Park the man, and even less about the artist. Like so many other self-taught American painters, he remains virtually anonymous.

We do know that he was born in 1826 in the southwestern Pennsylvania town of Marion (now Marion Center) and that his father, an Irish immigrant, had been the surveyor of Indiana County and was the founder of the town. Linton Park was an eccentric who, after serving in the Presidential Guard in the Civil War, returned to Marion to work as a painter, frame-maker, and inventor. Among his inventions are a food chopper, a "Feather Renovator," and a Venetian blind which won first prize at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. He seems to have been a kind and witty man who enjoyed strong opinions and convictions.

The subjects of many of his paintings were, like those of other self-taught painters, drawn from memory; his series of four lumbering scenes, for example, record his experiences while working in a lumbering camp near the headwaters of the Susquehanna in the 1850s, but these paintings were first documented in the late 1890s. *The Deer Hunter's Return*, probably painted about the same time, pictures a pioneer family's life in the winter wilderness of Western Pennsylvania. The *Flax Scutching Bee* seems to record an event from the 1840s which was painted in the 1880s; its unusual subject is well
described by Jean Smith in her excellent article on Linton Park in the November 1981 Antiques Magazine.

It should be pointed out that others of his paintings demonstrate the ability of the self-taught painter to tackle themes which his better-trained contemporaries — educated at Dusseldorf or Paris — would have hesitated to represent. For example, in a picture that is now called The Burial but which might better be titled Discovering the Grave, Park seems to have represented the traumatic moment of anguish when a young woman at last discovers the neglected grave of her Civil War beau. And in a painting inscribed Dying Tonight on the Old Camp Ground, Park dared give vision to the poignant Civil War ballad “Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Ground”; in a hospital tent in the left foreground a dying soldier reaches toward a vision of wife, children, and home in the nighttime sky. The drama of the great Johnstown Flood of 1889 so moved the artist that within six weeks he had completed a large canvas, now lost, which was offered for sale with half the proceeds to go to those who had suffered in the flood.

Linton Park died in obscurity in 1906; his paintings were re-discovered during the 1930s, after modern art had taught connoisseurs to appreciate the naive vision of the self-taught artist. Linton Park now numbers among those distinguished Pennsylvania artists such as Edward Hicks, Horace Pippin, and John Kane whose art provides us with such a clear and vivacious picture of the democratic experience.

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Elk County, which traces its lineage to Northumberland County, was procured through the Purchases of 1784 and erected as a county on April 18, 1843. It has long been one of northwestern Pennsylvania’s rural beauty spots. From the time of the Indians its flora and fauna have been a primary asset. In days gone by its fish and game provided sustenance for the inhabitants’ tables. In contemporary times these same natural resources provide financial succor for the county’s