On the Trail of 19th Century

Authenticating a Monumental Lithograph at the Duquesne Club

By Bruce M. Wolf
An extraordinarily large bird’s-eye view of Pittsburgh has been enjoyed by members of the Duquesne Club since the print was presented to the club by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in 1967.

The 43 x 85-inch lithograph, mounted in the first floor coat room, is untitled and unsigned, and had long been covered with a yellowed coat of varnish. In the 19th-century, artists prepared many such views of America’s cities and towns. In attempting to discern when it was produced, I was able to initially date this view to between 1859 and 1866 based on the inclusion of John Roebling’s Sixth Street Bridge, the depiction of the Avery House, and the Pennsylvania Canal in Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh’s North Side).
I sent a photocopy of the image to the Map Division of the Library of Congress, which holds the largest collection of bird's-eye views of American cities and towns. The division head had no information about the image; they had never seen this view of Pittsburgh.

When restoration of the print was discussed by the Duquesne Club's Art and Library Committee more than a year ago, I wanted to be certain the club was not spending funds to restore what might not be an original. The majority of experts on 19th-century Pittsburgh prints who had seen the lithograph were of the opinion that it was not an original, but rather a photographically enlarged version of a smaller print. I was of the same opinion. This opinion was supported by the absence of inscriptions, the unique size of the work and that it appeared to have been printed on separate sheets, the fact that it was a totally unknown image (no other examples were known), and the yellowed varnish which gave it the appearance of a reproduction. However, a close examination of the print under magnification reflects the random finely grained image of an original lithograph, revealing a clear-edged pattern or structure in which the ink is deposited. That is the structure by which the ink is retained on the lithographic stone before it is transferred to the paper. In a photographic reproduction, there is no clear-edged pattern; every change of tone appears gradual under strong magnification.

These inconsistencies encouraged me to continue the quest for another, perhaps smaller, version of the print that could provide a key to identification of the club's image. After exhausting all of my contacts with collectors of Pittsburgh images and dealers in New York, I sent a photocopy of the image to the Map Division of the Library of Congress, which holds the largest collection of bird's-eye views of American cities and towns. The division head had no information about the image; they had never seen this view of Pittsburgh.

A curator in the Map Division subsequently called to inform me that Dr. John Reps at Cornell University might be of some assistance in identifying the lithograph. Dr. Reps (Professor Emeritus, Department of City and Regional Planning, College of Architecture, Art and Planning) is a renowned authority on urban iconography and the history of American urban planning. Reps is the author of numerous books on the subject of historic lithographs of North American cities, and according to Franklin Toker at the University of Pittsburgh's Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Reps is "a giant in his field."

When I contacted Reps, he was as excited as I was about the discovery of this print. According to Reps, the club's print is probably a one-of-a-kind image by the little-known but very prolific 19th-century American viewmaker, James T. Palmatary. The image's size, period, style of rendering individual buildings, angle of perspective assumed by the artist, and the colors of lithographic ink all suggest strongly that the artist was Palmatary. He was
active in the 1850–1869 period and, according to Reps, was responsible for or associated with approximately 20 different views of eastern and midwestern towns and cities during that period. Many of Palmatary’s images appear on multiple sheets; the club’s image spans four.

Assuming this lithograph is by Palmatary, his view is the largest known lithograph ever done of Pittsburgh and the only 19th-century image of the city printed on multiple sheets. The previously largest known views of Pittsburgh are dwarfed by the Duquesne Club’s image; they are:

- the G. Warren Smith print, 22 x 41 inches, 1849;
- the Edwin Whitefield view published by Hudson & Smith, 17 3/4 x 37 inches, 1850;
- the Schuchman lithograph, 25 x 33 inches, 1859; and
- the Krebs/Armor image, 17 x 43 inches, 1871.

Examples of these Pittsburgh lithographs exist only in a few corporate and private collections in the city. Lithographic city views were very popular at the time and highly desired by the business community. Many of the buildings and other details in the lithographs were based on smaller daguerreotypes, and later photographs, of city scenes. Those surviving in good condition have sold for significant sums over the past decade. Whitefield’s Pittsburgh view reportedly sold for $11,000 a few years ago. The Whitefield and Schuchman views are especially rare. Most significant to the Duquesne Club’s print, Whitefield records in the collection of the Boston Public Library indicate that he hired Palmatary in 1850; it is possible that Palmatary also was associated with Whitefield’s 1850 view of Pittsburgh.

It is not surprising that only one example of the Palmatary view of Pittsburgh has been discovered. In part this is due to the print’s size; a Palmatary print of Chicago measured four by six and one-half feet; his view of St. Louis was four and one-half by eight feet; his print of Baltimore, printed on 12 sheets, was even larger. These extremely large lithographs were expensive to print and the purchase price surely reflected the labor involved. Only one or two impressions are known of Palmatary’s views of Chicago, Louisville, Syracuse, St. Louis, and Baltimore. Such a small number of surviving impressions suggests that few were produced or sold because of their cost. Their large size also made them difficult to store without damage, likewise contributing to their rarity.

Reps believes that Palmatary was not very successful from a commercial standpoint with respect to his images. Many of Palmatary’s other city views contain his name or the name of the publisher. The absence of any inscription on the Duquesne Club’s image suggests that it
Post Boy and other steamboats in the Monongahela River can be seen in the detail of the Duquesne Club mural.

might have been a proof, as is Palmatary’s St. Louis impression. In some examples, these large bird’s-eye views were attached to canvas and then mounted on a roller so they could be pulled down to be viewed. The constant rolling and unrolling of the images would have contributed to their failure to survive in significant numbers.

In order to better tie down the date of the image and confirm Palmatary’s role, I took a closer look at the lithograph under magnification. The steamboats in the lithograph could assist in dating the print, since these boats had very short lives and were well documented. The only packet vessel depicted in the print with a legible name is the Post Boy. According to Way’s Packet Directory 1848–1994, a comprehensive listing of packet boats active in the region during the period of the club’s image, there were three packet ships called Post Boy.

I was able to eliminate two of the ships; one exploded in New Orleans in 1858, and I had already determined that the print was made after that year. Another ship, although built in Pittsburgh, never operated in the city. The Post Boy depicted in the print, a side wheel packet, must have been one that was built in Elizabeth, Pa., in 1859 and owned by Capt. E.W. Gould. It was 215 feet long and weighed 348 tons. During the Civil War, it was a dispatch boat for the Vicksburg fleet. It burned, along with three other ships, in St. Louis on September 13, 1863. Confederate spies later claimed responsibility. Since most large ships were appropriated by the North and South after Fort Sumter in April 1861, it seems reasonable to tie the date of the print closer to the period 1859–1861. I could not identify names on any of the other steamboats shown in the print.

The print contains the names of many businesses and manufacturing concerns located in the city and on the South Side. The businesses within the city include Wm. K. Gerrard, Jones Wallingford & Co., L.B. Smith, Gazzams Buildings, St. Charles Hotel, S.A. Fannestock & Co., and at the Point the PRR Duquesne Depot. In today’s South Side, one can see Lyon Shorb & Co., Sligo Iron Works, Clinton Iron and Nail Works, Graff Bennett & Co., Pittsburgh Iron Works, and Zug & Painter. Many of these businesses were owned by some of the original members of the Duquesne Club including some of its founders. Two tug boats – McGrew & Stone and Vulcan Coal Co. – are also depicted.

While I was completing my research on the club’s lithograph, I became aware of a previously undocumented large bird’s-eye view of Rochester, N.Y., that was printed on multiple sheets and completed in 1867–1868. The proof, which is the only extant copy of that image, is located in the Genesee Country Village & Museum in Mumford, N.Y. The artist was William Henry Robinson. Robinson’s sketches for his print are located in the University of Rochester’s Department of Special Collections. Based on a review of detailed
photographs of the Robinson lithograph, both Dr. Reps and I agree that the Duquesne Club's image is not by Robinson. The style of rendering of the buildings by Robinson in his image is quite distinctive and not at all similar in style to the Pittsburgh image. Dr. Reps has informed me that, after decades of research in this area, one of the few printmakers he has uncovered that produced these large lithographs on multiple sheets, besides James Palmatary, was the more obscure Robinson.

To definitively tie down the date of the lithograph and verify Palmatary's authorship, I knew further research was required. This would include a search of local newspapers for notices that would provide the artist's name, perhaps his agent, the price of the print, where it was sold, perhaps some commentary about the subject matter of the lithograph, and possibly how much time was spent in its production. I had been reluctant to spend hours before a microfilm machine searching through Pittsburgh newspapers from 1859 to 1861 in search of articles mentioning James T. Palmatary. Fortunately, while in the process of writing this article, I discovered that the research had already been performed.

Local resident Gary Grimes, a former fine art dealer and regional art historian, is one of this area's treasures and the source of an encyclopedic knowledge of the art history of Western Pennsylvania. After completing most of my research on the Duquesne Club's lithograph, I contacted him. Gary recalled the name James Palmatary but he had never seen the Pittsburgh lithograph attributed to the artist nor was he aware that an actual copy of the lithograph had survived. Gary located the research he had on Palmatary, saving me numerous hours in the library. Grimes' research confirms for the first time the authenticity of an original work of art that may be the only surviving example of the 19th century's largest bird's-eye view of Pittsburgh.

The first newspaper reference to Palmatary's connection to the lithograph was in February 1859:

... we welcome to our city, Mr. J. T. Palmatary, who ... in connection with Geo. F. Schuchman & Co., will shortly publish a "Bird's-Eye View of Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Birmingham, South Pittsburgh, Sligo, Manchester and Lawrenceville. The view will be similar in extent and view to those which Mr. P. has already prepared of the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, etc.... The view of Pittsburgh will be six feet in length by four in width, and will exhibit to the eye every street, square and lane in the two cities and boroughs, with a correct and life like drawing of every public building, store, manufactory and private dwelling ... so minutely
THE CONSERVATION PROCESS INCLUDED THE REMOVAL OF THE VARNISH, REPLACEMENT WHERE POSSIBLE OF SOME SMALL MISSING AREAS, AND CONSERVATION FRAMING WITH ULTRA-VIOLET PLEXIGLASS.

described that more than two hundred signs of stores, etc., may be distinctly read.... Palmatary is now busily engaged in completing the drawings.... The lithography ... will be printed in oil colors.\(^8\)

The next set of articles appeared in September 1859, reporting on the exhibition at Artists' Hall at the County Fair:

The Bird's eye View of Pittsburg ... is seven feet by four, in four sections. But three sections were on exhibition, the fourth, comprising a view of part of the city of Allegheny, not being complete. This is the sixty-second view of the kind made by Mr. Palmatary; it was commenced in February last, and the sketching finished but a few weeks since. Six hundred copies will be printed as a first edition, four hundred of which will be delivered to subscribers.\(^9\)

The final set of newspaper references on the Palmatary piece appeared in November 1859:

It ... is a perpetual advertisement of many of the chief places of business in the city, the business signs of many actually, legibly appearing on their houses. This splendid work in form of a map, mounted on rollers, sells for the small sum of $10, and will be a sine qua non in every counting house in the city.\(^10\)

Restoration of the lithograph was commenced in summer 2003 by Janet English Heller, a paper conservator from Oberlin, Ohio, who has conserved works on paper owned by the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Westmoreland Museum of American Art. The club's image, protected over the years by a coat of varnish, was in excellent condition considering the amount of traffic it had endured.

The conservation process included the removal of the varnish, replacement where possible of some small missing areas, and conservation framing with ultra-violet plexiglass. Several working methods for the removal of the varnish were tested; the solution was to place strips of rayon crepe on the surface, saturate by spritzing with an ethanol based solution, covering with ethanol dampened cotton pads, and covering with a plastic film for approximately 20 minutes. This made the varnish layer soften and constrict, allowing it to be removed as a discreet layer. Because of the stability of the
image on its masonite backing, it was decided that removal of the paper from the backing should not be attempted. Flaked pieces found beneath the lithograph, and even farther afield, were then replaced.

The Duquesne Club's print of Pittsburgh and the information uncovered will be included by Dr. Reps in a supplement to his Views and Viewmakers of Urban America. The moral of this story is that just because something is unusual and apparently unique does not rule out the possibility that it might be an original work of art waiting to be discovered. Persistence often will enable one to locate the experts who can supply answers to the quest.

Bruce M. Wolf, a member of the Duquesne Club's Art and Library Committee, is a collector of early 20th-century views of Pittsburgh. An amateur historian, he is a member of the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center's Collections Committee.

Notes

1. John Roebling's Sixth Street Bridge (the second of four bridges at this site) was completed in 1859. The Avery House was demolished in 1866.
2. Working with Edwin Whitefield, Palmatary claimed some of the credit for the Whitefield views of Jersey City, Wilmington, Montreal, and Quebec. Palmatary was associated with Charles Parsons in a view of Lancaster, Pa., in 1853. He partnered with E. Sachse & Co. in lithographs of Baltimore, Maryland, and Alexandria, Va., in 1853. John W. Reps reports that Palmatary was responsible for views of Chillicothe, Ohio; Indianapolis, Ind.; and very probably those of Zanesville, Dayton, and Columbus, Ohio, all done between 1854 and 1856. Reps also believes that Palmatary performed work on lithographs of Sandusky, Ohio; Portsmouth, Ohio; Wheeling, W.V.; and Madison, Ind., all between 1854 to 1856. Palmatary issued his view of Louisville, Ky., in 1855, a view of Milwaukee, Wisc., in 1856, his large multi-sheet view of Chicago in 1857, and his larger view of St. Louis in 1858. Palmatary's last recorded city view was his lithograph of Syracuse, N.Y., in 1868. Reps believes that Palmatary was involved in the preparation of a 12-sheet view of Baltimore published by Sachse in 1869. From John W. Reps, Views and Viewmakers of Urban America: lithographs of towns and cities in the United States and Canada, notes on the artists and publisher, and a union catalog of their work, 1825–1925 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), pages 194–196.
3. The most comprehensive gathering of 19th-century views and other lithographic subject matter of Pittsburgh is in the collection of the Hillman Foundation. Other significant collections of early Pittsburgh views are contained in the institutional collections of PNC Bank, the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, and Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation. Additional examples can be found at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Mellon Bank, and Chatham College.
7. Joseph Gazzam, an attorney who later served in the Pennsylvania Senate, was a member of the Duquesne Club in 1873, the year of the club's founding. Christopher Zug, a founding member of the Duquesne Club, was considered one of the grand old men of iron manufacturing. Augustus E. W. Painter, chairman of the club's membership committee upon its founding, was among the group of industrialists sometimes referred to as the "Founders of Pittsburgh." From Mark M. Brown, Lu Donnelly, and David G. Wilkins, The History of the Duquesne Club (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Club, 1989), pages 6, 7, 167, 170.
8. Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, February 22, 1859, page 3, column 3. A similar article was published in the March 3, 1859, edition of the Pittsburgh Daily Post, page 1, column 1. The Daily Post article mentioned that Palmatary's St. Louis view can be seen at the office of George F. Schuchman & Co. The Post article stated that the Pittsburgh view was being published by subscription and "has received a very flattering encouragement from the business community." At the same time that Palmatary was working on his view of Pittsburgh, William Schuchman, George's older brother, had just completed his lithographic view of Pittsburgh. While smaller in size than the Palmatary view, the Schuchman contains vignettes of the Court House, Custom House, and the First and Second Presbyterian Churches. This now-rare view of the city originally sold for $5.
9. Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch, September 15, 1859, page 3, column 2. A similar notice appeared in the September 16, 1859, edition of the Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, page 3, column 3. On September 16, 1859, both the Daily Gazette and the Daily Dispatch noted that Palmatary's view on display in Artist's Hall was the center of attention. The Dispatch suggested that the city should purchase a reasonable number of copies of the lithograph for distribution abroad.
11. See endnote 2.

Acknowledgments

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