



Aaron Draper Shattuck
(1832 - 1928)

THE COOLEY GALLERY

Fine American Art

THE COOLEY GALLERY

is proud to present an exhibition and sale of fine paintings by

Aaron Draper Shattuck

(1832 - 1928)

June 3rd – July 17th, 2010

Please join us for an opening reception, Thursday, June 3rd, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

The impeccably painted artwork of Aaron Draper Shattuck is a testament to his life of hard work and dedication, qualities that permeated his every venture. He was a businessman and inventor with an unflagging entrepreneurial spirit, and a loyal and loving family man. At age twenty-two, he noted in his diary that he had “\$167.14 in hand,” but developed an estate that at the time of his death in 1928 was worth in excess of \$500,000. Shattuck and his beloved wife raised six children and germinated a lasting loyalty that has resulted in an admirable preservation of his legacy. This very group of works comes from a branch of the family, held together with pride and appreciation.

As an artist, Shattuck delighted in the infinite beauty that the Farmington River Valley offered. He rarely strayed far from home—New England held all the wonder and inspiration he needed. This small but excellent collection of works attests to his vision and passion for the valleys, streams, and byways he loved. For anyone familiar with this land, the artworks are indeed close to home.

I recommend to you Caitlin Murphy’s fine essay that follows, along with the gems of this fascinating man’s hand.

Jeffrey W. Cooley
Spring, 2010



Summer Day Along the River, oil on canvas, 14" x 24"

On the cover: *Summer Day Along the River*, detail.

CLOSE TO HOME

New England Landscapes of

Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832 - 1928)

by Caitlin R. Murphy

Passing through New England, a traveller encounters farmlands and valleys unfolding between dense woodlands, rolling hills, and craggy coastlines. Verdant landscapes in spring and summer provide annual counterpoints to the blazing colors of autumn and pale tones of winter. Modestly sized mountain peaks punctuate horizons, and rivers weave sinuous routes between lakes and waterfronts. This is the visual heritage and splendor found in the work of native landscape artist Aaron Draper Shattuck.

Shattuck was born in Franconia, New Hampshire on March 9, 1832. Although he is celebrated today for his intimate, precisely rendered pastoral landscapes in the Hudson River School style, his first art lessons were in portrait painting. Shattuck's family relocated to Lowell, Massachusetts in 1841 and a decade later, he became a student of Alexander Ransom (active 1840s-1860s)¹ in nearby Boston. When Ransom departed for New York City in 1852, Shattuck followed. He simultaneously enrolled in antique and life drawing classes at the National Academy of Design,² apparently intent on developing his skills as a budding portrait painter.

Of particular note in the exhibition is a portrait of a small child, *W. J. Collins, Aged Sixteen Months*. Signed and dated "A. D. Shattuck 1853," it is the earliest known example of Shattuck's work. As noted by John



W. J. Collins, Aged Sixteen Months, oil on canvas, 17" x 14"



Salmon Brook, oil on canvas, 10" x 14"

- 1 Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdts, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1985), 275.
- 2 Barbara Dayer Gallati, "The Shattuck Family: Aaron Draper Shattuck's Experiment in Narrative Content" in *The American Art Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, 37.

Walker Myers, the hands of a young artist are most visible in the naïve approach and lack of “underlying structure,” but the “portions of the figure, such as the head, show fairly accomplished handling.”³ His style at twenty-one years old was professional, competent, and showed promise of a bright future. Shattuck must have been confident with his portraiture skills, as he continued to pursue the genre. His first submission to the National Academy of Design in 1855 was titled “Portrait of a Lady.”⁴

1855 was one of the most crucial years of Shattuck’s career. It was then that Shattuck parted ways with Ransom and advertised his talents in *The Crayon* as a “landscape artist” with the remark that his “studies of rocks, grasses, and field flowers are truthful as well as earnestly painted.”⁵ As an impressionable young artist establishing his identity, Shattuck drew initial inspiration from the philosophies of Asher Brown Durand (1796-1886), a pioneer of the Hudson River School. Letters from Durand and the diary of Shattuck indicate that both artists spent the warmer months of 1855 in North Conway, New Hampshire. Samuel Colman (1832-1920), Shattuck’s good friend and later brother-in-law, occupied a house next to Durand that summer and most likely would have been the agent of introduction.⁶

This connection had a tremendous impact on Shattuck. In January of 1855, Durand published his first series of “Letters on Landscape Painting” in the commencement issue of *The Crayon*, and continued to do so in successive installments until the following July. Shattuck, who kept meticulous records of his purchases, debts, and income, listed in November a payment of three dollars for a subscription to the *The Crayon* “from Jan. 1st one year.”⁷ He therefore would have read in the back issues Durand’s encouragement to paint directly from nature and with scrupulous fidelity:

If your subject be a tree, observe particularly wherein it differs from those of other species: in the first place, the termination of its foliage, best seen when relieved on the sky, whether pointed or rounded, drooping or springing upward, and so forth; next mark the character of its trunk and branches, the manner in which the latter shoot off from the parent stem, their direction, curves, and angles. Every kind of tree has its traits of individuality . . . with careful attention, these peculiarities are easily learned, and so, in a greater or less degree, with all other objects.⁸

Durand’s letters provide significant insight into the methods and purposes of mid-nineteenth century landscape art and the spirit of the time in which Shattuck flourished.

Shattuck, along with the artistic milieu of New York City, was deeply affected by the intermingling of theories and currents in American art in the 1850s and 1860s. Pre-Raphaelitism emphasized “rigid adherence to that which the artist sees in nature and considers worthy of imitation by Art.”⁹ The Hudson River School artists reminded Americans of the country’s inherent greatness with carefully rendered and harmonious scenes

3 John Walker Myers, *Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832-1928): Painter of Landscapes and Student of Nature’s Charms*, dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History in the Graduate School of the University of Delaware, 1981, 37.

4 Gallati, 37.

5 “Domestic Art Gossip” in *The Crayon*, vol. 2, no. 21 (November 21, 1855), 330.

6 David Steinberg, “Aaron Draper Shattuck: 1832-1928,” in *American Paradise: the World of the Hudson River School* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 308.

7 Aaron Draper Shattuck’s diary, November 14, 1855, as cited by Myers, 47.

8 Asher B. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting” in *The Crayon*, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 17, 1855), 34.

9 William Stillman, “Pre-Raphaelitism and Its Lessons” in *The Crayon*, vol. 1, no. 16 (April 18, 1855), 1.



At the Fishing Hole, oil on board, 7" x 9"



Along the Stream, oil on canvas laid down on board, 8½" x 10"

of uninhabited land in response to industrialization and the impending Civil War. At the National Academy of Design, renowned artists Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) exhibited exotic scenery of South America and the paintings of Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) delighted in the vast wilderness of the American West.¹⁰

The common thread between the artists and actions of this period was a call to explore the glory of nature. Unlike many American artists of any generation, Shattuck felt little professional obligation to study in Europe; the pastoral landscapes of his environs instead became both subject and teacher. His travels included sojourns to the White Mountains, the islands and inlets of the Maine coastline, the Hudson River valley, and the Berkshires. "He knew the mountains, valleys, rivers, streams, and seacoast of this part of America intimately, and he left an enduring legacy of one man's vision of a particular segment of the American land."¹¹

Despite his intimate relationship with nature and the unabashedly rural quality of his artwork, Shattuck was very much engaged in a cosmopolitan lifestyle that was unique to New York in the final decades of the nineteenth century. As a frequent visitor of Pfaff's beer cellar at 645 Broadway¹² and a renter at the Tenth Street Studio Building, Shattuck found himself in the company of some of the most talented artists and intellectuals of his time, such as Walt Whitman, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Fitz-James O'Brien, Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880), Bierstadt, and Church. When Shattuck purchased a twenty-eight acre farm in Granby, Connecticut in 1870, his elegance and urbane mannerisms were thought bizarre by his countrified neighbors: "[They] remembered him as a well-dressed gentleman who would stand, waiting for the stagecoach, with his black cape thrown back, a black, silk top hat on his head, and a gold-topped cane in his hand."¹³

Shattuck assimilated quickly as he settled into the farmstead with his wife Marian Colman (the sister of artist Samuel Colman), and their six children.¹⁴ With a change in domestic circumstance came a modification in his lifestyle and art. Farming became just as much of a preoccupation as painting, and his compositions after this

10 Lynn Marsden-Atlass, "Good Grain and So Little Chaff: The Pennsylvania Academy's Role in Forging a National Art" in *In Private Hands: 200 Years of American Painting* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2005), 17.

11 Myers, 99.

12 Ibid., 11.

13 Helen Raye, "Aaron Draper Shattuck," in *Next to Nature: Landscape Paintings from the National Academy of Design* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1980), 76.

14 Charles B. Ferguson, "Essay," in *Aaron Draper Shattuck, N.A. (1832-1928): A Retrospective Exhibition* (New Britain: New Britain Museum of Art, 1970), 18.

date display an obvious enchantment with the verdure and pastoral quality of the region. He kept a considerable amount of livestock on his Granby farm and increasingly turned to his own backyard for inspiration; the sheep and cattle that he would buy and breed became accessories to his landscapes.

By the time of his inclusion in H.W. French's 1879 work, *Art and Artists in Connecticut*, Shattuck's earning power and passion to paint began to wane as the American Barbizon movement gained popularity. He exhibited very few pictures between 1877 and 1884, the latter date signaling the end of his public exhibition career, and ceased painting altogether in 1888. Crippled by the dual onset of measles and pneumonia that year and frustrated with his inability to advance as an artist, John Walker Myers suggests that his illness provided an excuse rather than a reason to end his career as a professional landscapist.¹⁵ His last years were spent withdrawn from New York City and the artistic lifestyle which he had once enjoyed. He instead took pleasure in the roles of animal breeder, horticulturalist, craftsman, and inventor. He made violins, and held several patents including a ventilation system for a tobacco barn and the oft seen metal stretcher keys on many of his colleagues' works.

In the year of his death, 1928, Shattuck was the oldest living member of the National Academy of Design.¹⁶ He was ninety-seven years old, and had only spent thirty-seven years painting. His career did not go unnoticed by important collectors and critics of his time, nor does it today. His legacy of sometimes ambitious, often intimate, and always finely crafted views of his beloved New England carries on and places him in the midst of the most brilliant artists of the late nineteenth century.

15 Myers, 151-152.

16 "Obituaries" in *American Art Annual*, vol. 25 (1928), 373.



Autumn Colors at the Falls, oil on canvas laid down on board, 11 $\frac{1}{3}$ " x 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ "



Evening in the River Valley, oil on canvas laid down on board, 12" x 19"



Summertime in the Valley, oil on board, 8" x 13½"



Pasture Elms, oil on canvas laid down on board, 11¾" x 19 ¼"



Elms in the Meadow, oil on canvas laid down on masonite, 10" x 14½"



Early Autumn in the Valley, oil on board, 9" x 14"



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www.cooleygallery.com



Summer Foliage, oil on canvas laid down on masonite, 11½" x 19"