

# Basic Detail Report



## **Title: Waiting for the Stage Coach**

Date: 1834

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e2c6

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: During the 1820s Alvan Fisher, Thomas Doughty, and Thomas Cole were among a group of American artists who were strongly inspired by the Romantic beauties of their native landscape. Although these painters were participants in what became known as the Hudson River School, their travels were not confined to New York State. For such Eastern-based artists seeking unspoiled nature and rugged terrain, the White Mountains in New Hampshire were an "accessible frontier." (1) In 1835 Cole described this mountain scenery of the granite state as a "union of the picturesque, the sublime, and the magnificent." (2) It possessed all the quintessential aspects of the early-nineteenth-century aesthetic. The White Mountains quickly became a popular destination for artists. As late as 1856, Fisher, in a letter to the editor of the Crayon, commented from North Conway on the magnetism of the area: But the most striking peculiarity is the large number of old habitues and frequenters of the place. I could mention, perhaps, fifty, who have [made] this summer their fourth or fifth successive one in this valley." (3) Fisher

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sketched the New Hampshire scenery along the Vermont border in the late 1820s, though the date of his first visit to the White Mountains is unknown. While at Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1833, he may have continued to travel north. By May of the following year he had definitely seen Crawford Notch and was exhibiting canvases based on direct observation of the White Mountains. He journeyed there in 1851, 1852, and 1856, which was probably his last visit to the region. All three trips were productive sketching tours, resulting in numerous paintings that Fisher offered for sale. "Waiting for the Stage" is a genre/landscape set in the magnificent scenery of the White Mountains. Cole's description of the area's beauty parallels Fisher's image: "The bare peaks of granite, broken and desolate, cradle the clouds; while the valleys and broad bases of the mountains rest under the shadow of noble and varied forests." (4) Prior to the coming of the railroad in 1851, the best means of traveling to the White Mountains was by stagecoach. (5) The New Britain picture depicts a pass in the mountains rather than an actual stagecoach stop. A gentleman is seated at the side of the road with a satchel and what may be a hiking stick or a maulstick and brush, which might add an autobiographical touch to this otherwise anonymous figure. On the left in the foreground is the man's dog drinking from what is probably the Saco River. While the dog seems oblivious to the sounds of the coach, the seated man is aware of its approach. The horse drawn stagecoach appears full. Three passengers are seated inside the carriage and two rather elegantly dressed gentlemen are sitting outside, above the two drivers. It is very likely that this vehicle is a Concord stagecoach, which was developed in the late 1820s. Because its carriage was hung on leather braces, the Concord coach had greater strength and a more comfortable suspension for travel over the kind of rough surfaces that could be encountered on the way to North Conway, the city at the base of the Whites. (6) It immediately became a popular mode of transportation. Despite the genre elements, it is the scenery that dominates. Fisher presents a landscape admired for the spectacle of its natural beauty. The anecdotal figures provide an important scale by which to measure the monumental size of the mountains. The romantic quality is underscored by the dramatic contrasts between shaded and lighted areas, especially the almost circular design of the clouds in the distant sky. In 1834 Fisher joined a group of Boston artists who organized an independent exhibition at Harding's Gallery. He submitted more than forty paintings for display. A critic for the Boston Daily Advertiser proclaimed: "The contributions of Mr. Fisher to the collection are numerous and valuable. . . . He seems to prefer rough, wild scenery to the more soft and gentle landscape." "Waiting for the Stage" may be the picture titled Gate, or Notch of the White Mountains, with the Source of the Saco River, which was offered for sale along with several other New Hampshire scenes. No specific reference was made to this painting in the contemporary press, yet a critic in New England Magazine characterized Fisher's genre/landscape style: "His scenes have generally--when he is left to compose them himself--some little incident or story that explains itself, and gives additional interest to the picture."(8) From 1834, when he first

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exhibited his White Mountain paintings at Harding's Gallery, until 1860, Fisher offered for sale at least sixty-one images with titles indicating that they represent sites in the environs of the White Mountains. Since "Waiting for the Stage" is undated, it could conceivably have been painted later than 1834, as is traditionally maintained. In auction sales from both 1852 and 1857 Fisher submitted several landscapes representing sites near the Saco River. (9) It is also interesting to note that the artist commonly signed his paintings "A. Fisher" in the 1830s and 1840s. In the 1850s, however, he frequently used only initials, as he did here. Yet whatever its original title and date of execution, "Waiting for the Stage" demonstrates Fisher's admiration for the scenery of the White Mountains and his continued appreciation of the American landscape. FBA Bibliography: Charlotte B. Johnson, "The European Tradition and Alvan Fisher," *Art in America* 41 (spring 1953): 79-87; Mabel M. Swan, "The Unpublished Notebooks of Alvan Fisher," *Antiques*, 68 (August 1955): 126-129; Robert C. Vose Jr., "Alvan Fisher 1792-1863: American Pioneer in Landscape and Genre," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 27 (October 1962): 97-129; Fred B. Adelson, "Alvan Fisher (1792-1863): Pioneer in American Landscape Painting," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1982; Fred B. Adelson, "An American Snowfall: Early Winter Scenes by Alvan Fisher," *Arts in Virginia* 24, no. 3 (1983-84): 2-9; Fred B. Adelson, "Alvan Fisher in Maine: His Early Coastal Scenes," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 3 (1986): 63-73 Notes 1 . Donald D. Keyes, "Perceptions of the White Mountains: A General Survey," in Keyes et al., *The White Mountains: Place and Perceptions*, exhib. cat. (Durham, N.H.: University Art Galleries, University of New Hampshire, 1980), p. 41. 2. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 1835, in John W. McCoubrey, ed., *American Art 1700-1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 103. 3. Alvan Fisher, "Letter to the Editor," *October* 1856, *Crayon* 3 (November 1856): 348-49. 4. Cole, in McCoubrey, *American Art*, p. 103. 5. R. Stuart Wallace ("A Social History of the White Mountains," in Keyes et al., *White Mountains*, p. 27), states: "From 1830 to 1850, road conditions and overland coaches were improved along all of these routes to the White Mountains." See also Keyes, "Perceptions," in Keyes et al., *White Mountains*, p. 44, for a discussion of the beginnings of the railroad. 6. Elizabeth Johns, "Settlement and Development: Claiming the West," in William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*, exhib. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1991), p. 217. 7. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 15, 1834. 8. M., "The Artists' Gallery," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 15, 1834, P. ?. 9. *Catalogue of Eighty-three Beautiful Paintings: Executed by Alvan Fisher, Esq, comprising all those subjects that Mr. Fisher has considered pleasing to the public . . .* (Boston: Leonard and Co., 1852), lists: View near the Source of the Saco River, near the Foot of Mount Willard (no. 18); View on the Saco River, near Mt. Crawford, N.H. (no. 20); View of the White Mountains, from near the Ford of the Saco, in North Conway, N.H. (no. 38); and A Composition. Study in the White Mountains (no. 60). See also *Catalogue of the*

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Original Oil Paintings of Alvan Fisher, Esq., Including LANDSCAPES, chiefly New England Scenery, and painted from sketches taken on the spot; . . .(Boston: Leonard & Co., 1857), which lists: Scene on the Roadside, between North Conway, and Albany, N.H. (no.23) and View in North Conway, N.H. (no. 31).  
Dimensions: 25 3/8 x 36 in. (64.5 x 91.4 cm)