

Basic Detail Report



Title: In The Shenandoah Valley (Off the Main Road)

Date: 1897

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e4ae

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: Although he also painted landscapes and historical scenes, Henry is best known for his small genre paintings, such as New Britain's "Country Breakfast" (1884) and "In the Shenandoah Valley", that depict daily life in rural Ulster County, New York. "In the Shenandoah Valley" finds an elderly couple in a buggy stopping for water at a farmhouse. The visit has caught the inhabitants of the humble dwelling at their daily chores. An older woman, presumably the lady of the house, stops to chat with the man drawing water from the well. A younger woman, sleeves rolled up, scrubs laundry in a tub. A girl tends to a baby and a boy and his cat press against the rails of the balcony to watch the strangers. The scene is depicted with a sense of truth and attention to detail. Indeed, Henry based his scenes on a firsthand experience of his subject supplemented by many sketches and photographs. He wrote John Ferguson Weir in September 1896, "I am working away-painting 'country folks' visiting old farm houses and villages 'Sunday types'-and they (being generally poor and their houses nearly always heavily mortgaged) can so easily be induced to pose as well as their 'nags' & 'rigs' for a small consideration I never have any

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trouble; at the sight of a half to a dollar-they are willing." (1) Henry often reused the same models in different paintings. The elderly couple in "In the Shenandoah Valley", for instance, closely resembles the couple in "Late Afternoon on the Old Delaware and Hudson Canal", at Port Ben, Ulster County, New York (1894; Spanierman Gallery, New York). (2) Henry also reworked favorite themes. Travelers engaged in conversation with local residents, perhaps asking for directions, or traveling peddlars visiting country farmhouses appear in numerous pictures. Many of Henry's Cragmoor scenes center around the theme of transportation; whether ferries, trains, canal packets, stagecoaches, buggies, oxcarts, or buckboards, vehicles served as a means of bringing both neighbors and strangers together. For Henry and his patrons, transportation also symbolized the slow but certain passing of the quaint customs and simple life of the past, for in a time of rapid industrialization and mechanization the horse-drawn carriage was becoming regarded as an old-fashioned mode of transport. From the beginning of his career, Henry found a ready market for his paintings. His pictures were shown annually at the National Academy of Design, where he was elected associate in 1867 and academician in 1869. It was often said that later in his career his paintings always sold on varnishing day at the academy. In his diary for 1899, Henry recorded that "In the Shenandoah Valley" was sold at an exhibition at the James D. Gill Gallery in Springfield, Massachusetts. (3) MAS BIBLIOGRAPHY: Elizabeth McCausland, "The Life and Works of Edward Lamson Henry, N.A., 1841-1919" (Albany: State Museum, 1945); Barbara Ball Buff, "Mr. Henry of Cragmoor," "Archives of American Art Journal" 21, no. 3 (1981): 2-7; Maureen Radl and Jan P. Christman, "E. L. Henry's Country Life: An Exhibition", exhib. cat. (Cragmoor: Cragmoor Free Library and New York State Museum, 1981); "The Works of E. L. Henry: Recollections of a Time Gone By," exhib. cat. (Shreveport, La.: R. W. Norton Art Gallery, 1987). Notes: 1. Henry to John Ferguson Weir, September 26, 1896, Weir Family Papers, microfilm, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll D129, frame 220. 2. Henry inscribed the verso of this painting: "The characters in the picture were residents of that locality and posed for me" (see "Works of E. L. Henry", p. 36. 3. The painting sold for \$75 (McCausland, "Life and Works of Edward Lamson Henry", p. 58)

Dimensions: Frame: 20 1/4 x 24 1/2 x 3 1/2 in. (51.4 x 62.2 x 8.9 cm) Image: 10 1/4 x 14 5/8 in. (26 x 37.1 cm)