

# Basic Detail Report



**Title: Winter in New England**

Date: 1851

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e22e

Medium: Oil on wood panel

Description: George Durrie was one of only a few nineteenth-century American artists who specialized in winter landscapes. For practical reasons, most landscape painters sketched in spring, summer, and autumn and worked on their compositions in the studio in winter. Because nineteenth-century Americans subscribed to the traditional notion of the seasons as a cycle of growth and decay, and winter was naturally associated with death, it was usually an unpopular subject for artists. (1) Perhaps Durrie was shrewd in taking advantage of the dearth of winter landscapes on the market, but he also found the season aesthetically pleasing. In winter 1844-1845, he wrote in his diary, "The tree sparkling with icy limbs, made the scene almost enchanting . . . . The weather has been rather cold, especially towards night, when it was quite blustering. The ground, trees, etc. were completely covered with ice, which, glittering in the sun, looked beautiful." (2) One of Durrie's first known

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winter scenes is *Sleighting Party*" (whereabouts unknown), exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York in 1845 and, according to Durrie himself, admired by Thomas Cole. (3) His earliest extant winter landscapes date from the early 1850s. *"Winter in New England"*, dated to about 1852, (4) belongs to this group, which includes *"Going Home to Thanksgiving"* (whereabouts unknown), and the *"Old Grist Mill"* (1853; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.). The anthropomorphic bare-limbed trees that appear in all three of these pictures do not recur in his later landscapes. (5) These trees, their broken and twisted branches almost expressive, recall the work of Thomas Cole and other Hudson River School painters, whose interest in anthropomorphism was undoubtedly familiar to Durrie. (6) His palette in *"Winter in New England"*, featuring cold blues and grays, and his heavy application of white pigment in the foreground icicles results in a successful image of the rawness of a New England winter. This use of impasto was unusual for Durrie, who usually applied paint thinly. *"Winter in New England"* displays the influence of Thomas Cole in other ways as well. Typical of Cole's work was an adherence to the compositional method of Claude Lorraine, who often framed a central body of water with trees and buildings. Here, Durrie used the gristmill (a recurring subject in Durrie's oeuvre) and the tree to frame the frozen pond and waterfall. *"Winter in New England"* is ultimately a nostalgic depiction of the Northeast, which was in the throes of the Industrial Revolution in the 1840s and 1850s. Water-powered mills were central to the earliest industrial towns, but by 1852 they had been replaced by stationary steam engines, which enabled manufacturers to move their enterprises to the cities. Durrie's depiction of a gristmill in the country alludes to a simpler, perhaps more picturesque, way of life that appealed to his public, who viewed rural America as a healthy antidote to an increasingly urban-centered nation. AE Bibliography: Bartlett Cowdrey, *"George Henry Durrie, 1820-1863: Connecticut Painter of American Life"*, exhib. cat. (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1947); Robert M. Lunny, *"George Henry Durrie's Snow Pieces: A Loan Exhibition"*, exhib. cat. (Newark, N.J.: New Jersey Historical Society, 1959); James Thomas Flexner, *"That Wilder Image: The Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer"* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962; reprint, New York: Dover, 1970), pp. 212-25; Colin Simkin, *"An Exhibition of Paintings by Durrie, Connecticut Artist"*, exh. cat. (New Haven, Conn.: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1966); *"Landscapes by George Henry Durrie"*, exhib. cat. (New London, Conn.: Lyman Allyn Museum, 1968); Martha Young Hutson, *"George Henry Durrie (1820-1863), American Winter Landscapist: Renowned through Currier and Ives"*, exhib. cat. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Santa Barbara Museum of Art and American Art Review Press, 1977). Notes: . Martha Hutson, *"The American Winter Landscape, 1830-1870," "American Art Review 2"* (January-February 1975): 60-61. 2. Durrie, quoted in Robert M. Lunny, *Snow Pieces of George Henry Durrie*, exhib. Cat. (Newark, N.J. of New Jersey Historical Society, 1959), unag. 3. Durrie, diary, paraphrased in *"That Wilder Image"*. Martha Hutson, *"The American Winter Landscape, 1830-1870,"* 4. Hutson, *"George Henry Durrie"*, p.

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50-51 5. For an interesting study of anthropomorphism in Hudson River school painting, see J. Gray Sweeney, "The Nude of Landscape Painting: Emblematic Personification in the Art of the Hudson River School," "Smithsonian Studies in American Art 3 no.4" (fall 1989): 43-65. 6. Hutson, George Henry Durrie, p. 51  
Dimensions: 19 7/8 x 25 in. (50.5 x 63.5 cm)