

Basic Detail Report



Title: Ipswich Marshes

Date: 1867

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e488

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: "Ipswich Marshes" is one of more than a hundred views depicting East Coast salt marshes that Heade produced during the last four decades of his life, beginning about 1859.(1) While some of the artist's contemporaries depicted marshes as a backdrop for hunting, sporting, or haying scenes, Heade was the first artist to paint them for their own sake.(2) The subject, which he painted more than any other, was quite popular with his patrons and may be considered uniquely his own. Heade's repeated treatment of this simple and tranquil theme, albeit with minor compositional modifications, allowed him to vary the effects of time of day, light, atmosphere, and weather, which intrigued him throughout his career. The Massachusetts coastline was one of the artist's favorite destinations in the 1860s. Ipswich is located on the Ipswich River, about thirty-five miles northeast of Boston. It is not far south of Newburyport, where Heade painted his first fully developed salt-marsh scenes about 1862. The New Britain canvas, however, is Heade's only known depiction of this site. Although his locales are often difficult to identify, two characteristics of "Ipswich Marshes" support its title, assigned to the work in 1961.(3) Ipswich's shoreline, unlike the surrounding areas Heade painted more frequently, is characterized by large expanses of open marsh, unarticulated by winding streams or rivers. Furthermore, the rise of land in the right background of the westward-looking view has been identified as the hilltop site of the town's almshouse, now known as Town Farm.(4) Heade painted "Ipswich Meadows" during his years of greatest creativity, the late 1860s. During this period, when he was living in New York

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between his second and third South American trips, he painted not only his most successful marsh scenes but also masterpieces such as "Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay". Like other works of this time, "Ipswich Marshes" is characterized by meticulous, nearly invisible brushwork and a tightly controlled composition. The extremely horizontal format is also typical, the width measuring over twice the height. Unlike many of Heade's other marsh scenes, however, there is no measured, zigzag pattern of water or haycocks from foreground to background. Instead, the viewer's eye passes over the scrub, grass, flowers, and water in the foreground and focuses on the large covered haycock at the left. This haycock, in turn, introduces a random recession into the scene dotted by over fifty haycocks of various sizes; the eye again focuses on the setting sun. Theodore Stebbins has noted that the marsh paintings allude to the passage of time.⁽⁵⁾ In "Ipswich Marshes" the grazing animals in the middle ground symbolize both ongoing farm work and the expansiveness of nature. Similarly, time and the change it brings are seen in the hay itself, which has been carefully packed but will soon be hauled away by farmers by boat or over ice. The haycock in the left foreground is protected from winds by a tarpaulin and from changing tides by the four staddles, or stabilizing stakes, surrounding it. Finally, the intensely colored sunset, reflected (in Heade's characteristic manner) on the undersides of long delicate clouds, alludes to the end of a long summer day.

SC Bibliography: Robert G. MacIntyre, "Martin Johnson Heade", 1819-1904 (New York: Pantheon Press, 1948); Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., "Martin Johnson Heade" (College Park: University of Maryland, 1969); Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., "The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade" (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975). Notes: 1. Rhode Island Shore (1859; Los Angeles County Museum of Art) is Heade's earliest known salt-marsh view. 2. Stebbins, Life and Works, p. 44. 3. Soon after Vose Galleries purchased the painting as Byfield Meadows, they assigned the work its current title. As Stebbins notes (Life and Works, p. 44), Heade rarely inscribed his works with title or locale. Furthermore, salt marshes, by their very nature, are very difficult to locate and identify. 4. Mary Conley, Ipswich town historian (telephone conversation, November 24, 1996). The almshouse, built in 1818, ended its operations in the 1930s. It should be noted, however, that a nearly identical land mass appears at the right of Hay Wagon in a Marsh (ca. 1875-85; private collection), which describes a different topography than Ipswich Marshes. It has more elevated land masses in the center and left background, and large areas of water throughout. Heade was known to reuse pictorial elements and did not always create topographically accurate views. For examples, see Sarah Cash, "Singing Beach, Manchester: Four Newly Identified Paintings of the North Shore of Massachusetts by Martin Johnson Heade," American Art Journal 27, nos. 1, 2 (1995-96): 90-91, 98 n. 25. 5. Stebbins, Life and Works, p. 53.

Dimensions: 12 x 28 in. (30.5 x 71.1 cm) Frame: 23 3/4 x 39 1/2 x 4 3/4 in. (60.3 x 100.3 x 12.1 cm)