

THE HEADWATERS

Early America *Re-imagines* the Glory of Rome

For over 200 years American writers, painters, and sculptors have been visiting Rome and creating art and literature from what they saw and experienced there. Benjamin West, in 1760, was the first American artist to go to Rome to study, to work, and to live. In the course of the next century (and to the present day) he was followed by scores of other painters, sculptors, and writers. The paintings and statues that they created, and the poems, novels, essays, and dramas that they wrote under the inspiration of that ancient city, have become artifacts of American culture.



Chapman, John Linton (1839-1905), *Claudian Aqueduct*, circa 1870, Oil on canvas

In the 19th-century Rome had both political and aesthetic value for Americans. Politically, Rome – a Republic that became an Empire – was both a model and a warning to Americans seeking an earlier democracy to emulate but be wary of the human tendency to abuse power. Aesthetically, it continued to offer the same unrivaled sources for picturesque, beautiful, and sublime creations that European painters had found there since the Renaissance. Three particular images of ancient Rome – the Roman Forum, the Colosseum, and the Campagna Romana (the surrounding countryside) – dominated the creative consciousness of the Americans, offering symbolic objects to ponder and include in paintings or writings. In finding their own ways of imagining and depicting Rome, these artists have demonstrated Rome's inexhaustible capacity to contribute to America's unending process of defining itself. That Rome – *America's Rome* – is the subject of this exhibition.

The idea of the Forum—the center of Roman political and religious life – as the place where the Romans established the principles of Law and Liberty, infused much of the political debate in the early years of the

American Republic over the role of the power of ordinary people in the creation of liberty and the balance among all levels of society. A number of American artists depicted the Forum, or the ideas inherent in it, in a variety of works that range from topographical to historical to commentary on 19th-century Rome in its own struggle for independence.

The most familiar of all Roman sights has always been the Colosseum: often described, painted both as a landscape ruin and as the backdrop for portraiture, and employed as a symbolic element in fiction. A magnificent architectural wonder, it had been historically the scene of the most violent entertainments and, legendarily, of Christian martyrdoms. It represented the Roman Empire during the centuries of greatest power and greatest decadence. It stood for what the Republic became. Did it also forewarn of what America might become?

Most of the artists who went to Rome did so in the belief that a painter was a poet and a historian and a moralist, and that Rome was the inspiration and school for this humanistic tradition in art. For over half a century Americans joined other landscape artists from northern Europe in the task of representing the beauty and interpreting the meaning of the Campagna and its adjacent hills.

Painters and writers evoked two contradictory visions of the Campagna. One is melancholy and moralistic, the other pastoral and transcendent. On the one hand, they present the wasteland of former civilizations, and on the other hand, the picturesque qualities of the present scene—the shepherds with their dogs, the goats and the sheep and the buffaloes, and the inducements to mirthful idleness on picnics in the verdant villas of Albano. All these images and ideas stirred writers and painters toward the illusion of an accessible Arcadia (an idealized pastoral world) beyond the city walls. Thus the Campagna was read both as historical desert and as eternal garden.

All of these depictions of the characteristics of Rome from the city to the countryside, the ancient past to the present, illustrate America's desire to define itself through art. Artists, writers, politicians, and travelers alike saw that understanding and experiencing the once great but fallen Roman civilization would ensure that the fledgling United States would emulate Roman virtues and avoid Roman vices. Rome allowed American artists to infuse their paintings with the poetry of this ancient human drama that their own country was too new to provide. Rome thus advanced American art while helping America better understand its foundation and its uncertain future. ©



SPRING 2009



This Spring we'll be completing the first phase of our master plan to expand and enrich the Native American interpretive area sited along the banks of Otsego Lake. Our ultimate goal is

to create an outdoor setting dedicated to more than a century of Iroquois life in this region. This site, when completed, will enhance our educational offerings and programs relating to the Thaw Collection and offer an unparalleled opportunity for visitors to learn about Native American art and culture.

The first phase of this project is a new pathway leading from the south side of the Fenimore Art Museum along the allée of maples down to the lakeshore and proceeding northward to the Mohawk Bark House. This pathway will improve access, visibility, and visitation to the Bark House while increasing visitor appreciation and understanding of the importance of Otsego Lake in American art, literature and history.

The new pathway will include interpretive signage describing the Fenimore Art Museum, the Thaw Collection, James Fenimore Cooper, Otsego Lake, and the Bark House. Benches will be placed to provide visitors an opportunity to reflect upon the beauty of their surroundings. This important phase of the project will be open Memorial Weekend and was made possible in large part from generous gifts from and obtained through the efforts of NYSHA Trustee Lucy Hamilton.

Subsequent phases will entail relocating the Seneca Log House currently sited at The Farmers' Museum, constructing period-appropriate outbuildings, and recreating historically accurate landscape and gardens. Utilizing Otsego Lake as a backdrop, a recessed seating area, sized to accommodate 45 visitors, will be created to host a variety of educational programs, including lectures and demonstrations relating to Native American culture and the environment. We continue to seek funding and welcome your contributions and ideas.

I hope that you will come later this Spring, take in the exhibitions, and then stroll down to the lake and enjoy the new outdoor offerings of the Fenimore Art Museum.

ANNE G. OLDER
Chairman

Interpretive Trail *Makes* the Connections

The histories of The New York State Historical Association and the Fenimore Art Museum are quite vast. Words can explain and summarize specific events that have led these institutions to their current place in time, but words cannot fully describe the discreet connections that relate those events. The new *Interpretive Trail*, opening Memorial Day weekend at the Fenimore Art Museum, creates an inviting way to explain these connections - all on a stately, scenic path.



The Mohawk Bark House on the shore of Otsego Lake, will soon be accessible by a new *Interpretive Trail*.
Photo by Frank Forte.

Visitors will be treated to large, colorful panels placed along the path, which will lend insight on the Fenimore Art Museum and its grounds - completing the museum experience. The *Interpretive Trail* highlights the connections between the museum's collections and the setting in which they are located, and focuses upon the importance of Otsego Lake in American art, literature and history. The panels will include details on the history of The New York State Historical Association, the Fenimore Art Museum and its environs and it will also provide a detailed narrative on the background of James Fenimore Cooper.

The *Interpretive Trail* begins near the entrance to the Fenimore Art Museum. It then weaves a path through a majestic line of trees and stretches lakeward, eventually leading visitors close to the edge of Otsego Lake. A short yet breathtaking stroll along the shore, invites visitors to explore the Mohawk Bark House. The path brings much needed visibility to this significant Native American site. The trail will be accessible throughout the year, weather permitting. ☺

2009 Gala takes us to *Rome!*

Mark your calendar for July 17th and join us on the Fenimore Terrace for *When in Rome*, a fabulous al fresco party and a highlight of the Cooperstown summer season. The Italian theme celebrates our summer feature exhibition: *America's Rome: Artists in the Eternal City, 1800-1900*, a unique tour through Italy from the perspective of 19th-century painters on their Grand Tour. *America's Rome* will be open in the Fenimore for special viewing during the gala event.

When in Rome promises to be an event you will not want to miss. Enjoy a fabulous Italian dinner served family style, sip fine wines throughout the evening, shop at an Italian marketplace of unique Silent Auction items, immerse yourself in Italian opera against the backdrop of Otsego Lake, and end the evening dancing under the stars. Celebrate in Italian fashion, old or new! Attire is anything from togas to jeans - just do as the Romans do...!

Proceeds from the 2009 gala will support educational



Guests enjoyed the 'Studio 54' dancing at the New York State themed gala in 2008.
Photo by David Kenny.

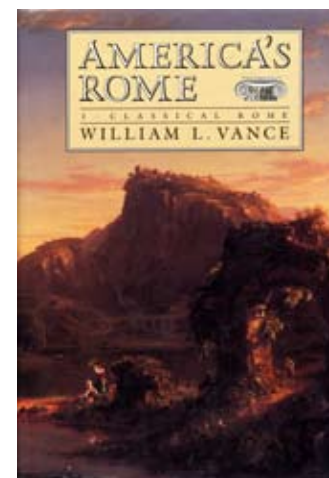
programming at both The Farmers' Museum and NYSHA, helping us fund the activities and events provided throughout the year for children and adults. One great event benefits two fantastic institutions!

Please consider not only attending this benefit event, but becoming a sponsor. Sponsors receive special benefits at the gala, and are recognized on promotional material surrounding the event. For more information on tickets, sponsorship opportunities, or making a donation to our Silent Auction,

please contact Emily Daunis at 607-547-1524 or gala@nysha.org.

For the past few years the NYSHA and The Farmers' Museum gala has been growing in its success and financial benefit. The 2008 gala *Buffalo to Broadway*, hosted over 200 people in the Museum's Louis C. Jones Center, and raised over \$60,000 for the two organizations. ☺

**The Farmers' Museum and NYSHA 6th Annual Benefit Gala
When in Rome, July 17th, 2009, 6:30pm
Fenimore Art Museum Terrace, Cooperstown, New York**



The Genealogy of Scholarship that Created *America's Rome*

My first encounter with Bill Vance occurred in the fall of 1989, when I entered Boston University's doctoral program in American Studies. Bill was the director of the program and taught the core course in American studies that fall. My experience up to that time was in the field of American art, stemming from my years as a curator for the Fenimore Art Museum. By the end of the semester, however, Bill had opened up a completely new world to me with his broad and inclusive thinking about the connections between American literature and art. The cornerstone of his approach to American studies was his newly published two-volume work, *America's Rome*. I recall thinking at that time what a terrific and important exhibition it would be, and I hoped that some day a museum would pick up on the topic and do it justice.

Now, 20 years after its publication, we are poised to do just that here at the Fenimore. For two years I have been working with Bill to shape his ideas into a visual narrative and secure the loans of artworks from a wide variety of museums and private collections. The result is our feature exhibition this year, with more than 100 paintings illustrating the 19th-century American fascination with Rome. Accompanying the exhibition is a new catalogue, with an essay by Bill and essays by scholars and collectors John and Mary McGuigan, which will include new research and numerous previously unpublished artworks. As a result, *America's Rome* the 2009 Fenimore Art Museum project, will bring the 1989 book up-to-date while celebrating its influence on the field over the course of a generation. ☺

— Dr. Paul D'Ambrosio

Sublime Nature: The Vista from Fenimore's Terrace



Artist Jean Tyson paints "en plein air" at last year's *A Taste of the Sublime* event. Photo by Todd Kenyon.

Painting "en plein aire" (in the open air) is a practice that achieved popularity with the rise of Realism, mid-19th century, when artists were rejecting the formality of the salons and academies and turning instead to the natural world for inspiration and "truth." Realism was a movement to democratize art, in step with other post-Industrial Revolution demands for social and political democracy. Declaring that art must have relevance to contemporary society, the Realists refused to paint moralistic or heroic models from the past and instead directed their thoughts to an idyllic and harmonious relationship with nature and its bounty.

There were many pockets of artistic activity that inspired and fueled each other, most famously the Barbizon School named for the French village where the artists congregated, with Rousseau, Diaz de la Pena, Millet and Coubert; John Constable in the UK; our own Hudson River School and the art colony at Old Lyme. Immersing themselves in nature, stimulated by the new science of optics and the play of light on form and how this could be conveyed by color and armed with paints packaged in tubes and newly developed box easels, painters took to the farms and fields and streams and mountains, capturing light as it danced off the landscape.

The Fenimore Art Museum's first "*Taste of the Sublime*" event honored this plein air tradition with a juried show of landscape artists, culinary treats from the agricultural bounty of the region, and a beautiful lakeside afternoon of activities for over 700 visitors. In the wake of this success, the museum will again present "*Taste of the Sublime*" on Saturday, August 8th. Artists wishing to submit their work for consideration should visit the website: www.fenimoreartmuseum.org. ©

Learning from a Distance...

Today's technology offers us some wonderfully advanced tools, which in turn, offer us the opportunity to bridge the gaps of distance, time and even culture. Taking advantage of such technology gives the New York State Historical Association the capability to reach outside its own environs and deliver a wealth of information to students across the country.

Without ever leaving the classroom, students are now able to view and discuss objects and images from the museums' vast collections in real-time. Museum educators from the Fenimore Art Museum and The Farmers' Museum lead the programs and encourage the students to take part in engaging activities and hands-on projects through a "virtual trip" to our museums.

The Distance Learning programs use the internet to bring programming directly to the classroom - wherever it may be. Utilizing a web cam, a microphone and a television, the teachers and students can see and hear each other - offering the opportunity for true interaction in an educational setting.

Since its inception over two years ago, the Distance Learning Program has broadcast to schools in over 15 states and reached out to over 1,000 students in 2008. Some of these schools have already returned for more programming. One of the reasons for its popularity is the cost; the fee for each program is very reasonable when compared to the cost of transporting students to a distant location.

Recent programs cover topics pertaining to the Fenimore Art Museum, including *Through the Eyes of Others*, a program dedicated to revealing the premise of the recent exhibition of the same name. Another popular program is "Abraham Lincoln" which was developed by the Distance Learning team in recognition of the 200th birthday of this famous president. Programs generally last 45 minutes depending upon the content.

Future plans take the programs across the street to The Farmers' Museum. The programs will move out of the studio and broadcast directly from historic sites on the museum's grounds. The Empire State Carousel will be the first site of focus; it already has several educational programs in place that are extremely popular. Another site being considered is the More House, which will offer the opportunity to demonstrate 19th-century methods of cooking.

Although primarily a means for the museums to disperse information, the Distance Learning program also has the ability to receive programming from other museums from around the globe. ©



Sarah Loveland and Bruce Markeson conduct a recent Distance Learning Program from the Fenimore Art Museum. Photo by Todd Kenyon.