



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

GEORGE WASHINGTON NICHOLSON (1832-1912)

The landscape and genre painter George Washington Nicholson was born in Salem County, New Jersey in 1832. While Nicholson apprenticed for a house painter in his teens, he was encouraged to follow more artistic pursuits and began experimenting with oil painting in the 1850s.

By 1861, the artist had moved to Philadelphia to practice art professionally and teach private painting lessons. Landscapists Arlington Lindenmuth (1867-1950) and James Sword (1839-1915) are thought to be among his students. While in Philadelphia, he soon met and married Jane (“Jennie”) Elizabeth Bray, who tragically died in 1963 after the birth of their only child.

Nicholson may have studied informally at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he was elected as an Associate in 1865. The following year, he traveled to Europe to continue his training, visiting England and then France, where he studied with Eugene Isabey (1803-1886), the marine and landscape painter. Additional international travel by Nicholson remains unconfirmed, yet scenes of Germany, Italy, Holland and Egypt were also featured among his landscape subjects. It is likely that these works were inspired by travel prints that were commonly circulated at the time. Indeed, Nicholson supplemented his income by producing engravings of his own.

Nicholson spent the majority of his professional career in Philadelphia. He did not exhibit widely, only seldom participating in shows organized by the regional artists’ organizations. He exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy once – in 1867 with a landscape entitled *Sketch from Nature, Looking Towards Windsor Castle*, preferring instead to exhibit his works at the local Haseltine Art Galleries. Nicholson was also an infrequent exhibitor in New York City, showing his work at the Union League Club (1873), the National Academy of Design (1874) and the Brooklyn Art Association (1875, 1876). Nicholson also exhibited at smaller regional exhibitions throughout North America, such as the Art Association of Montreal (1870), the Detroit Art Association (1875-76), and the Chicago Academy of Design (1876). He also participated in



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Midwestern agricultural and industrial fairs, such as the Agricultural and Mechanical Association, St. Louis (1870); the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition (1872); the Chicago Interstate Industrial Exposition (1874,1876); and the Louisville Industrial Exposition (1875,1877, 1880).

Nicholson's career reached its professional peak in the 1890s when he was commissioned to paint a large mural for Wanamaker & Brown, a prominent department store in Philadelphia. The design for this 1892 mural, titled *The Old Homestead*, served as the basis for his later commission to design labels for Canavan's Old Homestead Whiskey. Nicholson was also commissioned to paint a mural, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, for the Pennsylvania State House in Harrisburg. Unfortunately, the mural is thought to have been lost to a fire that destroyed the State House in 1897.

Though Nicholson painted murals and genre scenes inspired by literary subjects, he is most remembered for his landscapes executed in oil and watercolor. During his lifetime, Nicholson found a loyal patron in Alfred O. Deshong, a businessman from nearby Chester, Pennsylvania, who held twenty of the artist's paintings in his collection. These works are now owned by the Widener University Art Gallery and Collection. Nicholson's work can also be found in other public collections, such as the Arkansas Art Center, the Sewell C. Biggs Museum, and the Reading Public Museum.

Around 1902, Nicholson retired to Hammonton, in southern New Jersey, where he lived until his death in 1912 at the age of eighty.