

HUDSON HIGHLANDS

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James Lancel McElhinney

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SOUTH GATE FROM BEAR MOUNTAIN



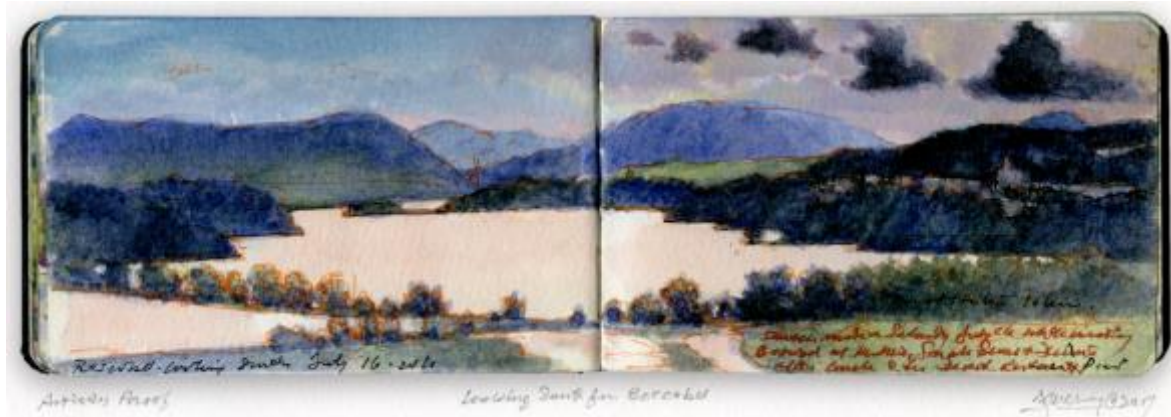
Bending around Trophy Point, the river follows a straight course for several miles, passing Buttermilk Falls and a small island known as Con Hook, below the guns of Fort Montgomery on a bluff just north of where Popolopen Creek spills into the Hudson. It was here that American patriot forces stretched a heavy iron chain across the river, floating on a series of rafts, below the mountain known as Anthony's Nose. Connecting its vertiginous western face to Fort Clinton—Montgomery's twin—on the bluff south of Popolopen Creek is Bear Mountain Bridge. Here the banks of the river widen again. A railway runs along a levee, enclosing an arm of the river, which over the years became marshland. The tracks cross Iona Island, which during the twentieth-century served as a naval weapons depot. Parts of the rocky islet remain off-limits to the public. To the south, reaching eastward is Dunderberg, or Thunder Hill, the downriver side of the south gate to the Hudson Highlands. Forming the northern gate-post is Roa Hook, below the southern declivity of Anthony's Nose. Cast in shadow, a small concrete structure marks the location in this painting. This view is from the deck of Bear Mountain Inn's Overlook Lodge, looking southeast toward the city of Peekskill, across the bay that bears its name.

WEST POINT FROM GARRISON'S LANDING



When the United States Military Academy at West Point was founded in 1802 as an engineering school, the curriculum included topographical drawing and mapmaking. Sylvanus Thayer became superintendent in 1817, expanding the requirement for second and third-year cadets to two hours of drawing instruction each day. The artwork that launched the Hudson River School was a view of Fort Putnam by Thomas Cole, painted in 1826. West Point quickly became a magnet for artists like George Catlin, William Bartlett, Benson Lossing, William Guy Wall, John Frederick Kensett and many others looking for picturesque subjects. Academy graduate and noted ethnographic artist Seth Eastman served as interim head of the drawing academy prior to the arrival of painter Robert W. Weir in 1834, whose forty-two-year tenure transformed the program. One of Weir's cadets became the celebrated artist James McNeill Whistler. In the foreground, Constitution Island anchors a row of trees lining the tracks of Metro North Railroad. Rising above the buildings to the right we find Crow's Nest Mountain, which served as a target range for cannon-tubes produced at West Point Foundry in Cold Spring, a few miles to the north. A casual observer might fail to realize that what they behold is not just a scenic vista, but a key location in American history—a center of science, technology and art which to the nineteenth century what Los Alamos was to the nineteen-forties, but traversed by a watery thoroughfare.

LOOKING SOUTH FROM BOSCOBEL



On September 14, 1608, the ship Half-Moon dropped anchor in these waters. On September 14, 1609, writing in his journal, Robert Juet described the setting. "The Land grew very mountainous. The River is full of fish."

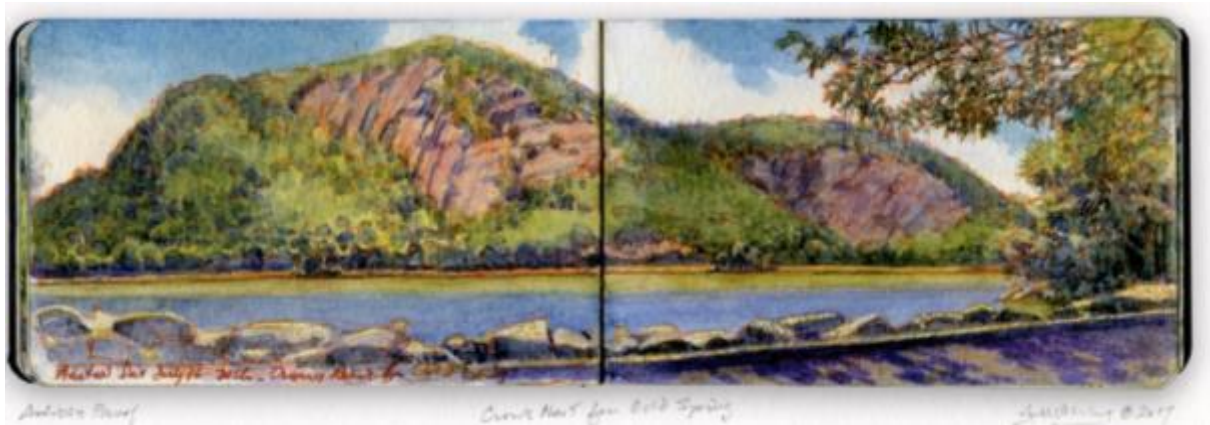
On September 25, 1780 Benedict Arnold boarded the Swan-class Sloop of War H.M.S. Vulture in these same waters. Famed as one of America's scenic treasures, the Hudson Highlands were shaped by the river carving a path through an outcropping of basement rock extending northward from the Reading Prong of Pennsylvania and the Ramapo mountains of northern New Jersey. The waterway variously known as Muhheahkunnuck, North River and Hudson's River has been a thoroughfare since the dawn of human habitation. Rising in the Adirondack Mountains, the river flows more than three hundred miles (500 kilometers) to its confluence with the Atlantic. In the early nineteenth-century more than three hundred commercial vessels daily plied the waters between Troy and New-York City. Traversing the foreground is the Hudson Line railway. The marshlands created when the railroad was built in 1851 were briefly converted to rice-paddies, until the scheme failed. In the foreground to the right is Constitution Island, with West Point on the far shore of the river beyond. This vista from Boscobel House and Gardens in Garrison, New York attracts thousands of visitors every year.

WESTERN HIGHLANDS FROM BOSCOBEL



Turn one's gaze to the southwest and the orderly divisions of Constitution Marsh become apparent. Channels cut through the marshland during the second quarter of the nineteenth century for the cultivation of wild rice. The blue summit to the left is Bear Mountain. Grey dashes in the foliage above the river are the stone buildings of West Point. Enclosed by the Hudson Line causeway to the right is Foundry Cove, which is fed by Indian Brook. Due to industrial waste had by 1980 the greatest concentration of cadmium pollution on the planet. In 1966, folksinger and activist Pete Seeger conceived the idea of building a replica nineteenth-century gaff-rigged sloop, setting off on cruises and concerts to promote Hudson Estuary rehabilitation. More than forty years later the sloop Clearwater carries Seeger's message up and down the river. Four years earlier public outcry led Consolidated Edison to abandon plans for a massive hydroelectric facility that would have cut into the north slope of Storm King Mountain, several miles upriver. The land is now a state park. Constitution Marsh is today a wildlife refuge providing habitat for local waterfowl. Herons and egrets plus a number of songbirds, migratory birds and raptors, including Bald Eagles. Every June almost one thousand snapping turtles come out of the marsh to lay their eggs.

CROW'S NEST MOUNTAIN FROM COLD SPRING LANDING



The village of Cold Spring was given its name by George Washington, after refreshing himself at a nearby spring. In colonial times, the village was nothing more than a cluster of buildings by a river-landing on the estate of Adolphus Philipse. In 1817 Governor Kemble established the West Point Foundry just south of the village. For nearly a century, as the foundry produced artillery pieces for the U.S. Army, the village grew into a town. Cannon-tube were finished, inspected, and tested by firing live rounds at Crow's Nest Mountain, across the river from the village. The rocky slopes are said to be littered with thousands of cannonballs and unexploded ordnance. The rocky escarpment at the base of the distant cliffs was known as Kidd's Plug, where the infamous pirate William Kidd is said to have buried his loot. Putnam County poet George Pope Morris praised the mountain with verse,

“Where Hudson’s waves o’er silvery sands
Winds through the hills afar,
And Cro’ Nest like a monarch stands
Crowned with a single star”

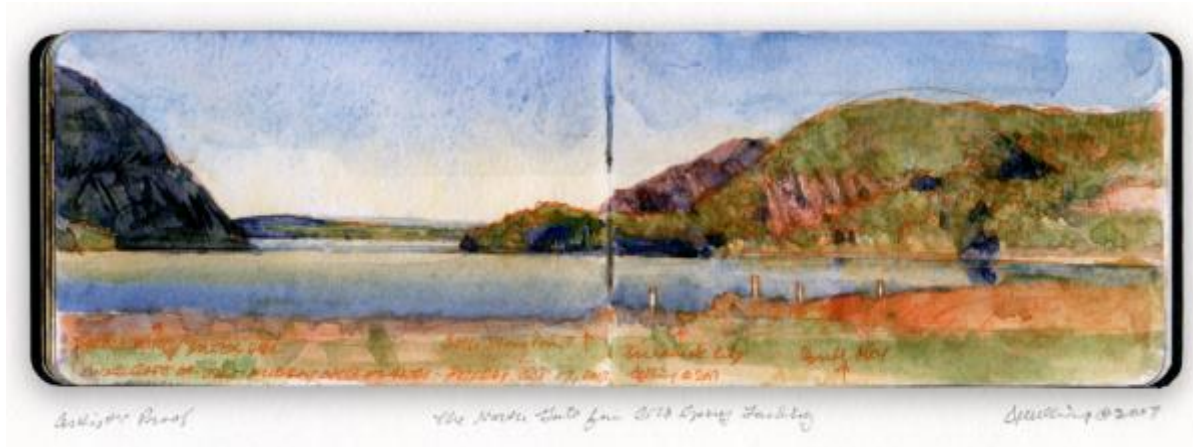
STORM KING FROM COLD SPRING VILLAGE



Boterberg (Butter Hill) was the name given by the Dutch to the mountain on the right, because it resembled a butter-loaf. Rising more than 1300 feet above the river, formed of Proterozoic granite and gneiss distorted by plate tectonics, its present form was sculpted between 100,000 and 12,000 years ago by glaciation that sheared off its southern slope to expose the rock-face visible today. The Hudson Highlands ranks as one of America's two fjords. The other, Somes Sound at Mount Desert Island in Maine, is where I first witnessed similar evidence of glacial activity smoothing one side of a geological uplift and tumbling down the other. Taking up residence on a hilltop north of Butter Hill, poet and critic Nathaniel Parker Willis named his estate Idlewild. In an age when explorers crisscrossed the globe naming every rock, tree and puddle, Butter Hill did not sit well with Willis, who gave it, in today's parlance, a better brand.

“Standing aloft before other mountains in the chain, this sign is peculiar to him. He seems the monarch, and this seems his stately ordering of a change in the weather. Should not STORM-KING, then, be his proper title?”

NORTH GATE FROM COLD SPRING PARK



The North Gate, or Wind-Gate of the Hudson Highlands is formed by Storm King, aka Butter Hill to the west (left), and Breakneck Mountain to the right, behind Bull Hill. In the middle distance is Little Stony Point. On the far shore beyond is the City of Newburgh, where George Washington made his home and headquarters from May 1782 to August 1783. The tranquil cove just north of the landing, juxtaposed against the rugged majesty of these upward-thrusting hills never fails to surprise and inspire. One can easily imagine Hudson and his crew passing this place, wondering where the river might lead them. In the words of Robert Juet, writing on September 15, 1609,

“...the morning was misty until the sunne arose: then it cleared. Se wee weighed with the wind at South, and ran up the River twentie leagues, passing by High Mountaines. Wee had a very good depth...and great store of Salmon in the River”

Hudson did not know that at the very same time, Sieur Samuel de Champlain was exploring the lake that today bears his name, and what is now Lake George. Had either party pressed on a little further, they might have met one another near Glens Falls.

THE ART OF MOBILITY

One of the first major trips James McElhinney and I took together was to England, where almost immediately upon arrival we headed for Greenwich. Entering the grounds of the Royal Observatory, he took out his sketchbook and made a drawing. In hindsight, our point of initiation for our joint life of art and travel made perfect sense. Greenwich is the location of the prime meridian of the world and zero degrees of longitude. Together latitude and longitude comprise the primary coordinate system for the navigation of the planet. Most people are acquainted with these markers mainly through the Global Positioning Systems (GPS) mounted on the dashboards of their automobiles, but McElhinney can navigate the globe without any such assistance. His drawings demonstrate his ability to measure and map terrain, even within the confines of a 3 x 5" page. Over time I have grown accustomed to arriving at a destination, seeing the notebook and micron pen come out, and realizing that the next thirty minutes or so will be spent fixed at the given spot. He positions himself in signature fashion with respect to the landscape before him. This is the mark of a strong, distinct vision, in which the act of studying the outward appearance of things is a way of taking possession of it, of making it his own. McElhinney's empirical sensibility is tempered by his respect for the art of the past. But always he looks to his Hudson River School predecessors. These notebook drawings evidence his synthesis of nature and culture, trace his appreciation of the great monuments of Europe and the landscape of the United States, and confirm his identity as an American Artist.

--Katherine Manthorne, Prof. of Art History, Graduate Center, City University of New York

THE ARTIST

James Lancel McElhinney is a visual artist, author and oral historian. McElhinney attended Tyler School of Art, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and Yale, where he earned an MFA in painting. McElhinney is a recipient of a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation., and a visual artist fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. McElhinney is listed on the Master Artist Council of the Arthur Miller Foundation. From 1991 to 2003 McElhinney created a series of artworks exploring historic battlefields as flashpoints in new conflicts between historic preservation and commercial development. Since 2005 McElhinney has painted in book-form, affording him greater mobility. Identifying with expeditionary artists such as John-James Audubon, George Catlin and Seth Eastman, McElhinney regards his paintings as interventions, encountering the *landschaft* as a palimpsest of simultaneous narratives; terrain organized by memory and desire, human activity, conditioned by topography, climate and the movement of water. website: www.mcelhinneyart.com

This book is number _____ of 50 copies

