

JAMES ORMSBEE CHAPIN AND THE MARVIN PAINTINGS:
AN EPIC OF THE AMERICAN FARM

BY

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This work is dedicated to Robert Hileman and to “my boys.”

Introduction

When the motives of artists are profound, when they are at their work as a result of deep consideration, when they believe in the importance of what they are doing, their work creates a stir in the world.

- Robert Henri¹

It was one of those instances of love at first sight. From the first time I looked upon them, I was smitten with James Chapin's paintings of the Marvin family [figs. 1.13, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, and 5.1]. While I admired the manner in which they were painted, it was the people I encountered in the pictures that attracted me most. Though there was no way I could have known them as individuals, I did know what kind of people they must have been. They reminded me of my paternal grandparents who, with all the strikes against them, farmed a small piece of land in the Missouri Ozarks and raised eleven children. Their needs were simple but they worked hard to meet those needs sun up to sun down. At times their lives could be difficult but they persevered and they endured. There were many American families like them in the 1920s whose roots ran deep into their own soil, people like the Marvins. But Chapin was the first American artist to take a long hard look at them and devote five years of his life—1924 to 1929—to capturing their way life in his art. Chapin's paintings of the Marvins are honest, down-to-earth representations of American farm life because they were derived from shared experience. He lived what he painted. I have since come to

¹ Robert Henri, [The Art Spirit](#). (New York: Harper & Row, 1984, Reprint of 1923 edition): 103.

learn that my initial response to this series of works was not that unusual; in fact it appears to have been quite common.

James Chapin, to borrow Robert Henri's apt phrase, created a "stir in the world" in the late 1920s and 1930s with "The Marvin Paintings," as they are commonly known. From their debut at the New Gallery in New York City in 1926, these unconventional depictions of a New Jersey farm drew the approbation of art critics from New York City to Chicago, and various points in between, many of whom praised the young adventurous artist for "discovering" the American scene and thus setting American art on a new course.² Here they claimed could be found the first affirmation of an American art that owed no debt to European modernism. Moreover, the paintings did not conform to any pre-existing models for they were neither academic nor modern, but something outside that binary opposition. Chapin had produced, according to his supporters, an indigenous, home-grown style, which he employed to depict a recognizable American subject, the independent, self-sufficient American farmer, rendered with total honesty. Chapin's Regionalist ally Grant Wood acknowledged the value of these original works in a 1940 essay he wrote for the catalogue that accompanied a retrospective exhibition of Chapin's work at the Associated American Artists Galleries in New York City. According to Wood, the paintings were "among the best things in American art," pictures that accurately captured "the pain and bleakness of a frugal existence on the land."³ Edward Alden Jewell, art critic for the New York Times and long-time supporter of the artist, wrote of the same exhibi-

² "New York Season" The Art Digest, 1 February, 1930:16-17. This notice of Chapin's 1930 exhibition at the Rehn Gallery in New York City cites several favorable reviews that had previously appeared in The New York Times, The New York Post and The Philadelphia Eagle.

³ Grant Wood, "James Chapin and The Marvins." (New York. Associated American Artists Galleries, 1940).

tion, “This show...establishes his [Chapin’s] position as second to none in our contemporary roster. It contains some of the finest paintings of our time. It...constitutes a full and ringing American challenge. In a word, this show is the real thing.”⁴

Chapin loathed painting the familiar, and no one like the Marvin family had yet appeared in American art. In the society of the 1920s, transfixed by rampant materialism and the ever-growing abundance of consumer goods, the self-sufficient Marvin family offered a striking contrast. They were hill-people, down-to-earth country folks, who for the most part kept to themselves, and Chapin’s paintings are a record of their struggles and triumphs. However, it would be a mistake to think of the Marvin paintings as objective renderings of rural farm life. Rather, they are subjective responses to a stimulus. For Chapin, the Marvins were representative of such virtues as self-reliance, personal fortitude, and perseverance in the face of adversity, all of which would become especially meaningful in the 1930s as the nation struggled through the Great Depression. They were humble people of the soil, the heirs of those men and women who settled this great nation, and thus in the eyes of the artist, noble and worthy of respect. Moreover, in Chapin’s hands, they transcend the particular, the individual, and eventually come to symbolize the typical, self-sufficient, hardworking American.

Chapin’s ambitious Marvin series consists of five paintings that the artist considered his major canvases, all of them portraits of members of the Marvin family. Additionally, there are an unknown number of paintings and sketches scattered

⁴ Edward Alden Jewell cited in “American Challenge.” Time, March 11, 1940: 63.

throughout the country that depict the Marvins working their farm.⁵ Due to the importance Chapin placed on them, the portraits will serve as the overall framework for this study outlined below, and they are: *Emmet, George and Ella Marvin*, also known as *The Marvins* [fig. 1.13], (Trenton: The New Jersey State Museum), *Miss Ella Marvin* [fig. 2.1], (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art), *Emmet Marvin, Farmer* [fig. 3.1], (Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection), *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* [fig. 4.1], (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), and *The Foxhunter* [fig. 5.1], (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum). These paintings and others from the time period, such as *A Farmer Cradling Grain*, 1929 (location unknown) and *The Grindstone*, 1928-35 (Private Collection), were featured in numerous art publications throughout the 1930s, and caused one contemporary writer to comment that this series might one day be regarded as an “epic of the American farm.”⁶

Chapin received a significant amount of critical praise during the 1930s for unearthing the American scene; but, as one writer noted as early as 1940,

I think far too little credit has gone to James Chapin apropos of his having been a true and puissant pioneer in the ‘native’ American movement, which became crystallized within roughly the last decade. For their part in the movement artists such as Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, and Thomas Benton have been lavishly publicized. Yet Chapin, steering an independent lone-wolf course, began the spade work for his profoundly significant Marvin cycle as early as 1924. Certain great pictures that belong to this American saga of his may be

⁵ Chapin left no record of the number of paintings he produced on the Marvin farm. The list cited in the appendix was culled from available exhibition records and contemporary publications in which they were reproduced. The Chapin family possesses approximately a dozen works from this period in their personal collections. However, the present locations of many works from this period are unknown.

⁶ C. J. Bulliet. *Apples and Madonnas: Emotional Expression in Modern Art*. (New York: Covivi Friede Publishers, 1930): 218.

quite justifiably looked upon as Baptist crying ‘Hear Ye!’ in the wilderness.⁷

The Marvin paintings, which took the New York art world by storm in the late 1920s and 1930s, have received little attention from critics and art historians in the years since. Furthermore, in studies and discussions of American scene painting since the 1940s, such as Matthew Baigell’s instructive The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930’s (1974), Chapin’s name is noticeably absent, despite his reputation as a pioneer of this nativist American movement. Even after he turned to commercial work in the early 1940s in order to support his family, Chapin, an unabashed realist, maintained his devotion to capturing the American scene and painted numerous portraits of men and women from all walks of life: actors, singers, baseball players, boxers, bar flies, and railroad workers, just to name a few. In May, 1941 he appeared on the cover of American Artist. The feature article titled “An evening in the studio of James Chapin” provided readers with a brief account of the artist’s training, an introduction to the works produced during the Marvin years and the reception they received and, perhaps most importantly, a thorough analysis of Chapin’s working methods. Christened a “profound painter of people and life” by the magazine’s editor Ernest W. Watson, Chapin went on to produce a number of portraits of important men for the cover of Time magazine during the 1950s, capturing the likenesses of such distinguished individuals as the United States presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson (1955), the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru (1957), the Russian novelist Boris Pasternak (1958), the celebrated jockey Willie Hartack (1958), and fellow

⁷ “James Chapin.” This article by an unidentified author is a review of the sixteen-year retrospective held at AAA in 1940 and is located in the files at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

painter Edward Hopper (1956), who had become a close friend. A year before his death in 1975, Chapin expressed the hope “that my own work may make some small addition to the knowledge of the people of my era.”⁸ And yet, as he once admitted to a reporter, “Nobody will know for another 100 years whether I am any good or not.”⁹

Although Chapin has received sparse attention from critics and art historians in recent years, when his contributions to the history of American art are acknowledged they continue to draw positive responses. As Christopher Hume observed in 1981,

When he was good, Chapin could be very, very good, but when he was bad, he could be pretty awful. His heyday lasted roughly from 1923-1940. During these years Chapin turned out a quantity of portraits as convincing and accomplished as anything produced in the USA before or since. His uncanny gift for likeness has not often been surpassed. But in the 1940s America converted to abstract art and for an unrepentant realist like James Chapin things could never be the same again. The change is dramatically illustrated by the number of one-man shows: between 1923 and 1940 there were no fewer than 26—in 1932 alone he exhibited eight times. But from 1941 until he died 35 years later Chapin was ignored, he held only two solo shows the entire time.¹⁰

Hume’s description and assessment of Chapin’s career as a painter is accurate in most regards. However, in an article that appeared in the art section of Time magazine September 28, 1953, Chapin was still identified as “among the nation’s best portraitists.” But as the unknown author also acknowledged, “his art is seldom shown and his name seldom heard.”¹¹ The writer attributed this oversight to the fact that Chapin

⁸ James Chapin quoted in Kenneth W. Prescott, James Chapin. [exhibition catalog] (Toronto: Yaneff Gallery, 1980).

⁹ “Pennsylvania Academy Buys Chapin Canvas.” Newspaper article dated May 4, 1940 from an unknown source and located in the files of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

¹⁰ Christopher Hume, “James Chapin at Yaneff Gallery,” Artmagazine, February/March, 1981: 49.

¹¹ “Public Favorites” Time, 28 September, 1953: 71-72.

preferred to paint not notable figures, like those who appeared frequently on the cover of the magazine, but the people who moved him personally, such as the blues singer Ruby Green. Her portrait, which Chapin painted in 1928 during one of his leaves from the Marvin compound, had become one of the public's all-time favorites, according to the art editors of Time.¹² However, the writer was in error for Chapin had already painted many notable figures such as the poet Robert Frost and the Academy Award-winning actress Katharine Hepburn, and in the late 1950s he would go on to create over a half dozen covers for the magazine. In spite of his commercial work, which appeared regularly throughout the 1950s, Chapin slipped into obscurity; like many of his realist colleagues, he was eclipsed by the Abstract Expressionists, who demanded and received the art world's full attention for their daring innovations in abstraction.

As Christopher Hume correctly noted, Chapin received only two solo exhibitions during the second half of his life. The first, *James Chapin: A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings 1921-1955*, was organized by the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton, and ran from April 25-June 19, 1955.¹³ The second appeared almost two decades later in 1974 when the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey, mounted an exhibition entitled *James Chapin: The Marvin Years*. However, the latter show consisted of a meager seven paintings from this series, and the descriptive catalogue, written by Maureen C. O'Brien, did little more than provide a cursory explana-

¹² A full-page, color reproduction of the painting *Ruby Green Singing* appeared on the page opposite the article.

¹³ The exhibition featured fifty-four works produced from 1921 to 1955. However, only two paintings from the Marvin years were displayed, *Sow and Sucklings Asleep* (1925) and *Fox Hunter* (1929).

tion for the works on display.¹⁴ The last retrospective exhibition of Chapin's work was staged in Toronto, Canada at the Yaneff Gallery in the winter of 1980, five years after the artist's death.¹⁵ The show featured approximately three dozen paintings that covered virtually every period of Chapin's long and varied career, the earliest pieces dating from his days as an art student in 1912, the most recent works from the early 1970s, when, due to his advanced age and ill health—he was in his mid-eighties at that time—Chapin laid down his brushes forever.

Owing to the early date of his move to the Marvin homestead situated in the backwoods of his native New Jersey, the five-year duration of his stay, and the scope of the work he produced while residing there, Chapin warrants our consideration as a pioneer of the American scene and the concomitant regionalist movement of the 1930s. He may even have discovered it, as some of his supporters claimed. Although a few American artists of a similar mindset had also begun to investigate regional differences across the country, Chapin was the first to produce a sustained visual account of a particular region, its people, and their customs. As this study will illustrate, Chapin and the Marvin series can lay claim to a prominent position at the forefront of American scene painting.¹⁶

The five portraits that Chapin produced of the members of the Marvin family serve as the foundation for the five chapters that follow. Each chapter will investigate one of the paintings and in doing so highlight its importance in the series and its significance in the history of American art. The first chapter, titled, “We Make Our-

¹⁴ Maureen O' Brien, *James Chapin: The Marvin Years*. (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 1974).

¹⁵ In 1969 Chapin, a life-long liberal, sold his small farm in New Jersey and moved his family to Toronto to protest the United States involvement in Vietnam and to insure that his two sons would not be called for military service. Chapin became a Canadian citizen shortly before his death in 1975.

¹⁶ The terms American scene and regionalism, and their relationship, are explained fully in Chapter I.

selves a Place Apart: James Chapin, Robert Frost and the Marvin Family” begins with an overview of regionalism in American art, its emergence and evolution, in order to define Chapin’s preeminent position within this loosely defined movement. This chapter also introduces the principal characters that constitute this “epic” of the American farm, and the important relationships that developed between them. A brief biography of Chapin’s early life and training is followed by an account of the artist’s collaboration and subsequent life-long friendship with the poet Robert Frost, which I contend played a decisive role in Chapin’s decision to abandon his New York studio in 1924 and take up temporary residence on the Marvin farm. The story of Chapin’s move to the hills of New Jersey and the five years he spent with the Marvins follows. A discussion of Chapin’s monumental portrait of siblings *Ella, Emmet, and George Marvin* [fig. 1.1], its reception by critics and the general public, and the universal significance it appears to have acquired since its appearance concludes the first chapter.

The remaining portraits are situated within a number of thematic contexts in order to understand and underscore their unique qualities and thus, their significance in the history of American art. Chapter two, “A Servant of Servants: Miss Ella Marvin” places Chapin’s portrait of the family’s matriarch within the context of images of American farm women. Such pictures are unquestionably rare, for visual representations of the American farm are most often centered on the male caretakers of the land and their labors. Yet when they do appear, pictures of farm women seem to follow certain conventions, some of which are found in Chapin’s portrait.

Due in part to their relative plentitude and variety, it is instructive to discuss Chapin’s *Emmet Marvin, Farmer* [fig. 3.1], within the context of representations of

the American farmer, which is the focus of chapter three. Chapin's painting belongs to a time-honored tradition of related images in American art, in which the American farmer comes to embody the ideals and virtues of agrarian life celebrated by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784). Yet, Chapin's portrait of Emmet Marvin is not an idealized representation of the yeoman farmer as seen for example in William Sidney Mount's *Bargaining for a Horse* (1835) or Jerome Thompson's *Apple Picking* (1856). He is instead more akin to the tenacious farmers who struggled through the Great Depression, men like Marie Atkinson Hull's *Sharecroppers* (1938). In terms of style Chapin's portraits of Ella Marvin and her brother Emmet best illustrate the artist's desire and ability to assimilate into his own evolving style the lessons he had learned regarding color and form from his studies of the French post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne.

Chapin's *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* [fig. 4.1], the topic of chapter four, is the most academic painting of the Marvin series and arguably one of the best. This remarkable painting is situated within the context of portraits of fathers and their daughters, which are also rare in the history of American art. Adhering to age-old gender conventions, fathers were generally represented with their male offspring while mothers were most often pictured with their daughters. Chapin reverses this convention. Interestingly, his regionalist colleague Grant Wood may have also, approximately four years after Chapin, in his iconic *American Gothic* (1930). However, the differences between these two works could not be more striking or instructive.

It appears that George Marvin was Chapin's favorite model during these years for there are more known sketches and paintings of him than of either his brother or

sister. George served as Chapin's model for *Fox Hunter* [fig. 5.1], the subject of chapter five. This portrait was reproduced in the popular press more often than any of the other paintings from the Marvin series. At the time it was painted, the sport of fox hunting was enjoying renewed popularity across the United States, and references to the hunt permeated popular culture. But, as this chapter illustrates, Chapin's lone hunter does not conform to conventional images of this ancient pastime. He is a special breed of foxhunter, the indigenous New Jersey hilltopper, who hunted more for survival than out of sport.

The final chapter considers Chapin's sketches and paintings of farm life as a lot. These works garnered a significant amount of attention from critics, who claimed to find something new and inspiring in these paintings of real farmers plowing fields, planting potatoes, and cradling wheat. As one critic wrote of these works, they are "...more than a mere presentation of the subject. Uncertain skies, growing trees and grass, disturbed earth—one can fairly smell the fresh turned sod—this is the essence of spring."¹⁷ As this chapter makes clear, Chapin's representations of the Marvins working their plot of land anticipated the countless images of farm life and its daily labors that appeared in the 1930s and 1940s.

The final chapter also provides a brief overview of Chapin's career in the post-Marvin years. Although he continued to devote most of his artistic efforts to capturing aspects of the American scene, Chapin's evolving style, which became decidedly more mannered and sentimental, and his work as a commercial artist appears to have damaged his reputation as a fine artist. Also, the taste of the art world had changed noticeably, and Chapin's brand of Americana quickly became anachronistic.

¹⁷ "Paintings of Farm Life" *Survey Graphic* (August, 1928): 464.

However, this study will demonstrate that Chapin helped set American art on a new course in the late 1920s and for that reason he warrants a position at the forefront of American scene painting.

Prologue

He placed a little raw sienna, burnt umber, and yellow ocher on his palette and loosely blended the colors, then lightened the combination with a touch of cadmium white. He loaded the brush and made two small but indispensable marks. The painting, on which he had labored for over a year and a half, was finished. He took a few sluggish steps back in order to examine it from a proper distance. In doing so he glanced up at the wall clock, purchased from the local five-and-dime, hanging high above the easel; its tick, tick, tick was audible like a heartbeat that soon becomes so familiar that one hardly took notice of it. The hands read 2:45. Puzzled, he looked out of the tall narrow window of the studio behind him and to his left: darkness. "It must be morning," he thought. Turning back toward the painting his first impression was satisfaction; the work pleased him, especially the principal characters that made up this colorful neighborhood market scene, the humble yet shrewd fruit vendor who in a quiet deliberate manner calls attention to the quality of the unblemished produce he holds ever so gently in his hands, his politely curious female customer, and her doe-eyed little girl clutching a bag of green-leafed vegetables. The composition was well done, the draftsmanship was competent, and the color was pleasing, rich, and purposeful. He was quite delighted with the rendering of the lower left corner, where an abstract arrangement of complementary colors, which he took from his studies of Cézanne, was used to suggest the wooden bed of the wagon.

This initial impression was soon tempered, as it always was, by a period of intense self-criticism. While he believed the work was good and that it had merit, it

lacked any sense of honesty or truth. There was no passion. Sloan, Luks, and Bellows had covered this ground a decade or more earlier, and better.¹⁸ The people that populated this fictitious vignette were simply models, acquaintances who, perhaps to indulge their vanity or achieve a sense of immortality, were all too willing to come to the studio and pose for an hour or two. The woman wrapped in the dark woolen shawl, who had posed for him on several occasions in the past, operated a bakery in the neighborhood and would take advantage of any opportunity that promised a break in her routine. The story, as depicted, never happened. It was all his invention, and it showed. The painting was, he had to admit, nothing more than a pastiche of portraits. And he returned to an idea he had been mulling over for some time, perhaps portraiture was his *raison d' être*. For as long as he could remember he had been fascinated by the physical features and gestures of the human being, and how those elements combined could convey the character or soul of an individual, and by extension an aspect of the universal human spirit.

As he looked around the room, his eyes alighted on a small rectangular table that functioned as a desk and more specifically, a couple of studies of old rustic barns he had produced a month or so earlier while on a visit to his childhood stomping grounds in West Orange, New Jersey. He had been drawn to the clean crisp lines of the structures, which were composed of simple geometric shapes: squares, rectangles, triangles, and trapezoids. The rural subject matter appealed to him as well. “The proper antidote,” he mumbled, to the feelings of confinement and restlessness that had plagued him in recent weeks. He walked to the table, picked up one of the draw-

¹⁸ The artists referred to here are John Sloan, George Luks, and George Bellows.

ings and studied it closely, retracing the lines with his eyes and following the progression of the pencil marks he had laid down some time ago.

He reached over to the corner of the table, which held his make-shift library, a dozen or so books standing neatly between two paint pots that functioned as book-ends, and pulled out a volume of poetry he had illustrated some ten years earlier. He ran his hands lovingly over the blue-gray cover and binding as though it were some cherished family heirloom filled with pleasant memories. He opened the cover and read the introductory verse:

The Pasture

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.¹⁹

And so he did.

¹⁹ Robert Frost, North of Boston. (First published 1914: London. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919): viii.

Chapter I

‘We Make Ourselves A Place Apart’:

James Chapin, Robert Frost, and the Marvin Family

James Chapin’s paintings burn themselves into my imagination.

-Robert Frost ²⁰

In a front-page interview with the tall, sophisticated, and conservative art critic Charles. J. Bulliet, published in the Chicago Evening Post Magazine of the Art World a few days after Christmas, 1925, James Chapin flatly remarked, “We have had too much of theory, too much of a straining for the abstract. What we need now is to go back and take another look at nature and the concrete things of nature—back to the soil—back to the smell of the barnyard.”²¹ Chapin was well-acquainted with the fragrances of farm life, having moved to rural upstate New Jersey a year and a half before, and there renting a two-room log cabin on a farm owned by the indomitable and self-sufficient Marvin family. Little did he know at the time that the work he would produce there over the next few years would bring him the professional recognition he had long sought from critics and the public.

While Chapin’s decision to “go native” in June of 1924 endeared him to anti-modernist critics like Bulliet, who would promote his work for years to come, it was not without precedent in American art, for a number of his contemporaries had al-

²⁰ Robert Frost quoted in Kenneth W. Prescott, James Chapin. (Toronto, Canada: Yaneff Gallery, 1970): 1.

²¹ James Chapin quoted in C. J. Bulliet, “Our American Cézanne: Chapin Smashing His Way to the Top.” The Chicago Evening Post Magazine of the Art World (December, 29, 1925): 1.

ready exhibited a similar nativist impulse. For instance, Childe Hassam created a series of watercolors in the 1890s to illustrate Celia Thaxter's regionalist manuscript *An Island Garden* (1894), which is a delightful narrative of her home on Appledore Island that attracted many of the leading artists, musicians, and writers of the day.²² Charles Burchfield had begun to explore the region around his home in Ohio as early as 1915. Three years later, Thomas Hart Benton began a series of mural-size paintings known as *The American Historical Epic*, which, due to various circumstances, was never completed. However, Chapin broke new ground with his desire and commitment to focus on a particular locale and create a sustained record in numerous paintings and sketches the characters, customs, and textures of farm life he encountered in the New Jersey countryside. Thus, as I will illustrate, he might well be regarded as the pioneer of the ill-defined regionalist art movement, and moreover, the greater American scene, both of which took form in the 1930s.

The concept of regionalism first appeared in American literature during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, though at that time it went by the name of "local color."²³ Hamlin Garland, one of the leading proponents of this new literary movement, defined it as an attempt to reproduce the facts of the immediate present, the texture of life, which the writer has experienced. In "Local Color in Art," one of

²² Appledore Island, Maine (formerly known as Hog Island) is the largest of the Isles of Shoals. It is located 10 miles off the Maine/New Hampshire coast.

²³ The literary concept of "local color" in American literature flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was wide-ranging in its scope. Celia Thaxter, *An Island Garden* (1894), Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of Pointed Firs* (1896), and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, *A New England Nun* (1891), wrote poetic accounts of life in the Northeast; Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899) and the African-American writer Charles W. Chestnut, "The Conjure Woman" and "The Wife of his Youth" (1898), wrote unsettling tales of Southern life; and Hamlin Garland, *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891), Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1899), Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), and Willa Cather, *O' Pioneers* (1913), *The Song of the Lark*, (1915), and *My Antonia* (1919), thrilled readers with riveting narratives of settlers struggling to eke out a living in the untamed and perilous West.

twelve essays collected in Crumbling Idols (1894), which he dedicated to “The men and women of America who have the courage to be artists,” Garland wrote, “Local color . . . means that the writer spontaneously reflects the life which goes on around him.”²⁴ For Garland, local color was “a statement of life as indigenous as the plant-growth. It means that the picturesque shall not be seen by the author,—that every tree and bird and mountain shall be dear and companionable and necessary, not picturesque; the tourist cannot write a novel.”²⁵ Furthermore, this form of literature is a “natural and unstrained art” since, as Garland clarified, “. . .it is the most natural thing in the world for a man to love his native land and his native intimate surroundings.”²⁶ In “Literary Prophecy,” which also appears in Crumbling Idols, Garland further defined the writer of local color: “The realist or verist is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what is; but he writes of what is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be, by contrast. He aims to be perfectly truthful of his relation to life, but there is a tone, a color, which comes unconsciously into his utterance, like the sobbing stir of the muted violins beneath the frank, clear song of the clarinet. . . .”²⁷

Having defined the proper subject matter of this new literary form as well as the requisite character of the author, Garland then spelled out the manner in which it should be rendered. In 1893 Garland attended the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, where he was introduced to the works of the Impressionist painters. The luminous, sun-drenched pictures of modern life on display stirred his imagination and

²⁴ Hamlin Garland, “Local Color in Art.” Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting, and Drama (Chicago and Cambridge: Stone and Kimball, 1894): 52.

²⁵ Garland, “Local Color in Art,” 64.

²⁶ Garland “Local Color in Art,” 62.

²⁷ Hamlin Garland, “Literary Prophecy.” Crumbling Idols: 43.

he wasted no time in hammering out a connection between the French avant-garde and the local color movement in American literature. As was his manner, Garland embarked on a tireless campaign to promote Impressionism through lecture tours and his writings, in which he discussed the parallels between painting and fiction. In an essay titled “Impressionism,” also included in Crumbling Idols, Garland stated that the impressionist painter best conveyed his concept of local color in art since “He takes fresh, vital themes, mainly out-of-door scenes. He aims always at freshness and vigor.”²⁸ However, Garland cautioned his readers, “One school cannot copy or be based upon the other without loss. Each painter should paint his own surroundings, with nature as his teacher, rather than some Dutch master, painting the never-ending mists and rains of the sea-level.”²⁹

As the following pages will make clear, Chapin either consciously, or more likely unconsciously, tapped into Garland’s ideas of a regionalist art with his move to rural New Jersey in 1924, three decades after the publication of Crumbling Idols.³⁰ As he would explain some years later, the Marvin series was not carried out in any search for the picturesque. Rather, he rented a cabin on their farm because he wished to cut his living expenses, and he painted the Marvins because they were a part of his daily life. “You don’t get good stuff if you go out and try to be picturesque,” Chapin declared, “mainly because you don’t understand what you are painting. My farm life was more or less a retreat, and these people with whom I fished and worked during

²⁸ Hamlin Garland, “Impressionism.” Crumbling Idols: 105.

²⁹ Garland, “Impressionism,” 104.

³⁰ Due to Chapin’s life-long love of American literature and his early vocation as a commercial artist involved in the book trade (c. 1907-17) it is possible that he was familiar with Hamlin’s text and the ideas expressed within its pages. However, as one of my mentors, Dr. Martha Kingsbury, once told me, one has to be cautious in drawing connections for sometimes these ideas “are just out there in the air.”

the day became a part of my life that it was only natural for me to paint.”³¹ There is no question that Chapin was plowing virgin and fertile artistic soil at the Marvin farm, for it would be almost another decade before the concept of regionalism gained any currency in the visual arts.

“Regionalism” entered the lexicon of American art in the early 1930s, and quickly became, as Robert Hughes has aptly described, “the first full-scale American art-world hype.”³² Credit for launching the concept of regionalism in American art goes to Maynard Walker, a Kansas City journalist turned New York art dealer.³³ In 1933 Walker, a fervent foe of modernism, mounted an exhibition at the Kansas City Art Institute titled “American Painting Since Whistler,” which consisted of about three dozen paintings by thirty American artists. The curator had cast a wide net, for the exhibition included works by painters who would appear to have little in common aside from their nationality: artists of such diverse sensibilities and talents as Albert Pinkham Ryder, John Twatchman, George Luks, Ernest Lawson, and, perhaps most importantly, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood.

Walker, a savvy and shameless promoter with good connections, was successful in enlisting the local press to publicize the exhibition. The show received additional exposure when Walker talked up the exhibition in an interview with The Art Digest, which turned out to be quite opportune, since the magazine was as conservative and anti-modernist as the show’s curator. In the article titled “Mid-West is Producing an Indigenous Art,” Walker railed against the modern art then being produced

³¹ “Pennsylvania Academy Buys Chapin Canvas.” This newspaper article is in the files of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; although dated May 4, 1940, the source is unknown.

³² Robert Hughes, American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America. (New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1997): 437.

³³ Maynard Walker oversaw the art department at the Kansas City Journal-Post before his move to New York City and the Ferargil Galleries.

in Europe and the influence it was gaining over many American artists, who were simply mimicking their European counterparts. He also chastised the galleries and museums that eagerly collected and sanctioned this “rubbish,” as Walker labeled it, and which was, to use his exact words, the work of “carpenters,” “madmen,” “freaks,” and “drug addicts.”³⁴ According to Walker his exhibition featured the real thing, “real American art...which really springs from American soil and seeks to interpret American life.”³⁵ Furthermore, this “indigenous art expression” as Walker identified it, was the art of the future, but only if the galleries and museums would support it.

Importantly, Walker claimed that the most vital modern art in America was then being produced in “our long backward Middle West,” and largely through the efforts of Benton, Curry, and Wood, on whom he lavished the most praise.³⁶ The latter two painters were featured in a photograph that accompanied the article. Attired in a farmer’s uniform of white shirts and blue-bib overalls, Curry and Wood are shown on a working holiday at the regional Stone City art colony, Curry having just completed a sketched portrait of his Iowa colleague. It is a decidedly folksy image, maybe even a bit hokey, but it resonated well with Walker’s like-minded audience.

Through a fortunate twist of fate, The Art Digest story came to the attention of Henry Luce, the conservative, right-wing founder of Time magazine, who authorized the Christmas, 1934 issue devoted to the “Regionalists,” as they had become known, thus providing Walker’s exhibition, as well as the stars of the show, some much de-

³⁴ Maynard Walker, “Mid-West is Producing an Indigenous Art.” The Art Digest. Vol. 7, No. 20 (September 1, 1933): 10.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

sired national exposure. The cover featured a self-portrait by the cantankerous Benton, and the four-color printing process the periodical had recently adopted was employed on the lavish spreads inside—a first for the magazine.³⁷ The lead article, titled “Art—U.S. Scene,” reiterated much of Walker’s contention, yet narrowed the definition of regionalism in its focus on the Midwestern painters: Benton, Curry, and Wood. According to the unnamed reporter, these men were “earthy midwesterners... restoring American values through their art, in the face of the outlandish foreign import, modernism.”³⁸ Thus “Regionalism” came to describe a modern art movement with an emphasis on three specific individuals from the American heartland, as well as a particular type of art that featured idyllic scenes of farm and small-town life. As Erika Doss has explained, one of the most important cultural and critical issues in the United States during the interwar years was defining indigenous and inimitable forms of modern American art that bore no resemblance to that being produced in Europe.³⁹ The Regionalists responded by reviving interest in such things as American history and folklore, and identifying what they believed to be the genuine people, places, and things characteristic of the Midwest.

Generally speaking, all of the Regionalists treated their subject matter with a palpable reverence. They paid tribute to such self-effacing individuals as the independent farmer and small-scale businessman, for it was they who best exemplified the virtues of agrarian and small-town America. While Chapin’s admiration for his subjects is clearly evident in the paintings he produced on the Marvin farm he, unlike the

³⁷ Thomas Hoving, *American Gothic: The Biography of Grant Wood’s Masterpiece*. (New York: Chamberlain Bros., 2005): 100.

³⁸ “Art—U.S. Scene” *Time* Vol. XXIV, no. 26, (December, 24, 1934):

³⁹ Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 77.

Regionalists, sought to create an unvarnished and unromantic representation of his hosts' daily struggles, as well as the few fleeting pleasures they allowed themselves. Although Chapin had begun the "spade work" almost a decade before Walker's landmark exhibition and had earned some critical success, he was ignored, his singular contributions to a "regionalist" aesthetic essentially marginalized in the annals of American art history.

James Chapin: Early Life and Training

James Orsmbee Chapin was a native son of New Jersey, nicknamed "The Garden State." He was born in the township of West Orange—at the time a more rural than suburban community—on July 9, 1887. That year Grover Cleveland was halfway through his first term as President of the United States; Frank J. Sprague, an electrical engineer and former employee of Thomas A. Edison, designed the electric trolley, which soon displaced the horse-drawn car and became the primary means of public transportation in most American cities; and the sport of baseball was well on its way to becoming the national pastime. "I guess I am the usual mongrel breed typical of all so-called real Americans," Chapin once confessed to an interviewer. "There is English, Welsh, and Dutch blood in me," he clarified.⁴⁰ Chapin's mother, Adelia S. Ryder, descended from a Cape Cod sea-faring family; her father Calvin Ryder (b. 1815), a sea captain, had sailed his clipper ship around the world.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "James Chapin's Americana: A Native American Who Did Not Have to Go Native." [Pictures on Exhibit](#). Vol. 3 No. 6, (March, 1940): 6.

⁴¹ United States Census Records, West Orange Township, Essex County, New Jersey, 1870: p. 481B. Chapin's father was James Ayrault Chapin (b. 11 August 1848, d. 17 February 1921). He and Adelia Ryder (b. 12 January, 1858) were married 21 November, 1883 in West Orange, New Jersey. Chapin's paternal grandfather was Hummiston Chapin who wed Sarah Hunt Wing.

Chapin was a shy, self-conscious child, who from the age of six was afflicted with a speech impediment, a bothersome stammer that he spent the next twenty years attempting to overcome. A loner by nature, Chapin took delight in reading. He also liked to roam the New Jersey countryside on his bicycle—his primary mode of transportation at the time—pausing frequently to sketch or fish, and to canoe up and down the Passaic River and its tributaries. Much to his parents' displeasure Chapin dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen in order to make his own way. He headed to New York City and found employment as a bank messenger; weekends and vacations he passed at the family's home in West Orange. All the while Chapin had been honing his drawing skills and, upon learning that the Cooper Union offered free evening classes, he attempted to enroll there, only to be informed by the admissions personnel that he was too young and would need to reapply when he was eighteen and of age. Chapin impatiently waited and, once admitted, he spent approximately the next two years at Cooper Union copying from plaster casts. Despite the repetitiousness of his studies, he welcomed the break it afforded him from his mind-numbing desk job in the bank's mortgage department.

Seeking opportunities to develop his skills further, Chapin transferred to the Art Students League sometime during 1907. He signed up for evening classes in anatomical drawing from Charles Bridgman, with whom he would spend the next two years. However, Chapin eventually grew tired of his daily routine as a bank employee as well as frustrated with the lack of progress he was making in his art studies, and so

See also Harry Salpeter, "Chapin Little Man in Art." *Esquire* (August, 1940): 107.

he decided to abandon both and take a six-month hiatus at an aunt's island home.⁴² Once his emotional well-being was restored, Chapin returned to New York City and took on a variety of odd jobs, one of those being an illustrator of textbooks.

The turn of the twentieth century was a golden age of illustration in the United States due to the mass circulation of magazines, newspapers, and illustrated books. Until the appearance and implementation of half-tone photography a decade or so later, the majority of illustrations produced were either pen and ink sketches or wood engravings. As Erika Doss has reported, by 1905, more than twenty heavily illustrated mainstream magazines reached a combined audience of 5.5 million people. Their circulations skyrocketed due to inexpensive prices, low postal rates, increased subsidies, and the public's insatiable demand for sensationalistic stories of graft and corruption.⁴³ In addition, new and sophisticated printing techniques, such as photo-mechanical reproduction, were utilized to mass-reproduce visual imagery, and both big business and the popular media soon discovered the vast public demand for pictures. Chapin was certainly engaged in a profitable and promising trade, for commercial artists such as Charles Dana Gibson, Maxfield Parrish, and J. C. Leyendecker were earning critical and public acclaim for their illustrations of American life that were being published on the covers and in the pages of such popular periodicals as Scribner's, Colliers, and The Saturday Evening Post. In addition, a few of Chapin's colleagues at the Art Students League, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan, were seeking to parlay their experiences as newspaper illustra-

⁴² The name and location of the island are unknown.

⁴³ Doss, 43.

tor-reporters into successful careers as fine artists. Unfortunately, none of Chapin's work in illustration from this time has come to light.

In 1910, one of Chapin's wealthier relatives provided him with a small subsidy to study art abroad. He made Antwerp, Belgium his destination after learning from a recent visitor to the city that living expenses were low and that a free art school was located there. Chapin spent approximately the next two years taking day and evening classes at the Antwerp Royal Academy. Chapin benefited from the rigor of academic instruction for he was recognized and rewarded for his studies in draftsmanship with a gold medal in drawing. Restrained by a tight budget Chapin lived a rather parsimonious existence, spending no more than \$2.50 a week for food and lodging. According to one report, he was able to stretch his meager resources further by taking his daily meals at a longshoreman's eating-house, the cost being less than a dollar a month.⁴⁴ Certainly, the new and different ways of life Chapin was exposed to during those repasts added to the bargain.

It is difficult to reconstruct Chapin's time and training abroad, for so little of his work from this period has been located. *Bruges Gossips*, a small print produced between 1910 and 1912, is one of Chapin's rare etchings; it is also the only work I have located that dates from his European sojourn [fig. 1.1]. The print was perhaps nothing more than an experiment on Chapin's part. It was created during his residence at the Antwerp Royal Academy and at a time when the etching revival was witnessing a second flowering in the United States. This renewed interest in the art of etching expired at the close of the nineteenth century for numerous reasons, only to be reborn in the early twentieth century by a second generation of American artists

⁴⁴ Anonymous, "A Painter of Labor," *The Literary Digest*. (May 8, 1926): 26.

living and working abroad.⁴⁵ It is quite possible that Chapin was introduced to this medium while studying in Antwerp. Like many of his contemporaries he may have been drawn to etching as an economical form of art for recording one's experiences abroad. Yet, like many other young American artists who took up the needle while studying in Europe, Chapin appears to have laid down his etching tools soon after returning home to the United States.

Bruges Gossips is a decidedly conventional image, one that was intended to evoke the distinctive way of life found in the timeless city of Bruges, Belgium, described by many visitors fondly as “the Venice of the North.” Two multi-story structures—the one in the distance features a distinctive Flemish stepped roofline—form a picturesque backdrop for the encounter Chapin chose to represent. Two heavily cloaked figures wearing white caps, their outer garments rendered in short, straight, parallel lines, occupy the middle-ground. Although their sex is in question, it is assumed that they are female, due to the popularity of this subject among America's peripatetic artists-etchers.⁴⁶ Their chance encounter takes place on one of the many stone footbridges that cross the slow-moving waterways. Taking some time away from their daily responsibilities they pause for a few minutes in order to exchange some words of idle gossip. Through an economy of means Chapin effectively suggests the location, the gray, damp atmosphere of the city, and the spirit of the women's conversation.

⁴⁵ Reed Anderson, *American Etchers Abroad: 1880-1939*. Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 2004.

⁴⁶ Herman A. Webster, who was living and working in Paris during Chapin's European sojourn, specialized in images of women conversing on street corners as seen in his etching *Rue de la Parcheminerie* (1907).

This seemingly insignificant print is important for several reasons. First and foremost, it is the earliest work by Chapin's hand that I have been able to locate. Secondly, it provides some idea of the artist's early drawing style and confirms that he was a competent draftsman. And finally, the print indicates that Chapin experimented with etching for a brief time and thus possessed some knowledge of the process. All of this seems a bit ironic in light of the fact that a few years later Charles Bulliet, one of the artist's most ardent supporters would write, "Chapin is a comparative failure in black and white—except with some broad surface like charcoal. He can scarcely be conceived as doing an etching."⁴⁷ Although the critic praised Chapin as a brilliant colorist, he belittled his skills as a draftsman, which raises the question of how much knowledge Bulliet possessed of Chapin's training and early work as a commercial artist.

In 1912 Chapin's formal education came to an end. His funds exhausted, he returned to New York City, picked up where he left off and found work as a textbook illustrator. Like many young men wishing to draw attention to themselves Chapin could be a bit rebellious at times. Although he had spent the previous two years acquiring a classical art education, Chapin plunged headfirst into the world of the avant-garde soon after he arrived back in the United States. Perhaps on a weekend excursion to Paris, Chapin became acquainted with the paintings of French post-impressionist Paul Cézanne, and he was smitten. The attraction intensified in 1913 when Chapin was presented with another opportunity to see the work of the painter from Aix-en-Provence at the Armory Show, the first large-scale introduction of European modern art to American audiences. Chapin's early fascination with Cézanne was

⁴⁷ C. J. Bulliet, "Our American Cézanne: Chapin Smashing His Way to the Top.": 1.

demonstrated through his slavish imitation of the master's style, and as one writer has correctly observed, "what he [Chapin] did to Cézanne might have made the artist whirl around in his grave in vexation."⁴⁸ As Chapin admitted some years later, he was over-influenced by Cézanne early in his career and only later, during the five years he spent on the Marvin farm, did he begin to understand the true structure of Cézanne's paintings and discover a way of assimilating the French master's lessons into his own evolving style.⁴⁹

Although Chapin experimented with abstraction, he never ventured into the realm of nonrepresentational art. His realist sensibilities would not allow it. Chapin's work immediately prior to and following his years on the Marvin farm has an affinity with the form of American realism advocated by the influential art instructor and theorist Robert Henri. The subjects for many of Chapin's early paintings, such as *Pretzel Man* (1923), *The Banana Vendor* (1924), and *Street Scene, New York* (1933) were drawn from the same environment that artists associated with the Ashcan School frequented and immortalized in their works a decade or so before. These works and others like them—as well as the time he spent as a student at the Art Students League from 1907-1910—suggest that Chapin had some familiarity with Henri's theories and the works of the artists within his orbit. In *The Art Spirit*, a compilation of lectures, letters, and general advice to aspiring artists published in 1923, Henri stressed the importance of self-reliance and individuality, to the point of instructing his students: "Don't take me as an authority....You have to settle all of these matters for your-

⁴⁸ Salpeter, 107.

⁴⁹ Cézanne's influence on Chapin and his work is discussed in a Chapter Two.

self.”⁵⁰ As Forbes Watson explained in the introduction to The Art Spirit, Henri sought to cultivate spontaneity and a respect for the American outlook. “He showed them the Frenchmen but he did not encourage them to imitate the Frenchmen. Without jingo Henri taught them self-respect. It was not a crime to look at American material with American eyes,” Watson wrote.⁵¹

Henri is one probable influence prompting the direction Chapin would steer his art. There were many others as well, though none as important for our purposes as the poet Robert Frost.

A Most Important Friendship: James Chapin and Robert Frost

“We make ourselves a place apart.” So stated Robert Frost in “Revelation,” one of his earliest poems.⁵² Frost used this phrase, in part, to declare his independence, to assert the originality of his work, and to express his desire to be recognized as an artist of genuine talent. When James Chapin first met Robert Frost in 1917, the painter was working to make himself “a place apart,” and owing to the friendship that would develop between them he was able attain his goal.

Chapin’s illustrations had come to the attention of publisher Alfred Harcourt, who was affiliated at that time with the publishing firm of Henry Holt and Company. Harcourt, impressed with Chapin’s commercial work, arranged for him to illustrate the second American edition—the first illustrated edition—of Robert Frost’s North of

⁵⁰ Robert Henri. The Art Spirit. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964): 100. Reprint of the original text published by Lippincott, 1923.

⁵¹ Forbes Watson, “Introduction.” The Art Spirit: 5.

⁵² Robert Frost, “Revelation.” Originally published in A Boy’s Will, (1913); Reprinted in The Poetry of Robert Frost. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1975): 19.

Boston, which was to be published by Henry Holt.⁵³ Although the details concerning their first meeting are unknown, Chapin is thought to have first met Frost at their publishers. Frost was thirteen years older than Chapin. Despite their age difference, the two men took to each other—and to each other’s work—from the start, and Frost was delighted to have Chapin illustrate his second volume of poems.⁵⁴ It can be said that, at the time of their introduction, the artist and the poet were at similar stages in their lives, for both were still poor, comparatively unknown, and determined to become successful in their chosen vocations. They can be described as “rugged traditionalists,” men highly conscious of the forms employed in their professions, and men who found their freedom within the limits of those forms.⁵⁵ Their shared love for baseball and respect for honest work strengthened the bond between the two men. Moreover, they resembled each other physically. Both men were of average height, weight, and build and they were both fair-haired with clear blue eyes. It is quite possible that Chapin, an only child, found in Frost the older brother he never had, someone to look up to for guidance and support. Still, it is difficult to gauge accurately the depth of their reportedly long friendship, since no written correspondence between the artist and the poet has been located.⁵⁶ Despite this lack of documentary evidence there is no question that Frost left a profound and indelible impression on his young collaborator.

⁵³ North of Boston was first published in London by David Nutt in 1914; the first American edition appeared a year later and was published by Henry Holt and Company in 1915.

⁵⁴ “With Wisdom Coiled Inside” Time (May 19, 1961).

⁵⁵ Jay Parini, Robert Frost: A Life. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999): 28. The author uses this phrase to characterize Frost’s approach to poetry. I believe it is also applicable to Chapin’s work during the Marvin years.

⁵⁶ The only reference to Frost in the Chapin Papers is a photocopied title-page of their collaboration *North of Boston*. In a letter written to his daughter Lesley Lee Francis January 25, 1919, Frost asks Lesley to give his regards to the Chapins, who he describes as “really nice people.” Frost goes on to add, “I like Chapin. Remember me to him particularly.” Family Letters of Robert and Elinor Frost, ed. Arnold Grade (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972): 45.

The three portraits Chapin painted of the poet over a fifty-five year period bear this out.

The first painting, created in 1917, is a likeness of Frost the farmer poet [fig. 1. 2]. It served as the frontispiece for their collaboration North of Boston (1919). The conventional bust-length portrait, rendered in bold, loose brushstrokes, was painted the same year Frost joined the faculty at Amherst College, which may explain his formal attire consisting of white shirt, tie, and overcoat; Frost's everyday work clothes would have been wholly inappropriate in such a context, since he wished to be seen as serious artist. Frost had recently purchased a small farm just outside of Franconia, Vermont, and although the property lacked such creature comforts as electricity and indoor plumbing, it appears that he found this primitive lifestyle to be conducive to his work and overall spirit. Frost had taken up farming as an avocation in 1899 after recovering from a serious illness. His doctor, convinced that Frost's sedentary lifestyle had exacerbated his ill health, recommended that his patient consider farming as a possible occupation. Frost admitted many years later that this was one of the best pieces of advice he ever received, and he reportedly responded well to the ritual life of agriculture, with its appointed rounds and predictable rhythms.⁵⁷ Although he would eventually have to give up farming, due primarily to his teaching responsibilities, Frost maintained a garden to the end of his life.

Frost's first experience as a farmer was as the caretaker of the Powder House Hill farm, a rental property, which he and his family moved to in April, 1899. On July

⁵⁷ Parini, 67-68. However much he enjoyed the work, Frost was not the most proficient and prosperous farmer. He liked to sleep late, he was never really comfortable around livestock, and he often neglected his chores due to frequent illnesses and bouts of depression.

8, 1900, his son Elliott contracted typhoid fever and died within days; Frost's heart-rending poem "Home Burial," which appears in North of Boston was possibly inspired by this tragic event. The house and property fell into neglect as the Frosts sought to recover from their loss. They fell behind on their payments and were evicted in September, 1900. The following month Frost purchased a thirty-acre farm near Derry, New Hampshire. The property was ideal for raising vegetables and livestock; it possessed a variety of fruit trees, woodlots, open fields for cultivating hay, and even a west-running brook fed by a pasture spring. The Frost family became self-sufficient farmers, their basic needs satisfied through honest work and nature's bounty. The Frosts worked the Derry farm for over a decade—from the fall of 1900 to November, 1911—when they reluctantly sold the property; Frost's poetry had begun to consume too much of his time. Within two years, the family had moved to London, England as the invited guests of the publishing firm David Nutt, which had just published Frost's first book of poetry, A Boy's Will (1913). Mrs. Nutt, the publisher's widow, so liked the volume that she encouraged Frost to follow it up with another. The poems that comprise the core of North of Boston (1914) were written there over the next eight months.

Many of Frost's best poems were carved out during the decade spent on the Derry farm and they form the bulk of his first two volumes, A Boy's Will and North of Boston. As Frost once remarked, "It all started in Derry, the whole thing."⁵⁸ In a conversation with Louis Mertins some years later, Frost elaborated: "To a large extent the terrain of my poetry is the Derry landscape....There was something about the experience at Derry which stayed in my mind, and it was tapped for poetry in the years

⁵⁸ Robert Frost quoted in Parini, 72.

that came after.”⁵⁹ It was on the farm that Frost, who wrote in an early notebook “Locality gives art,” developed his distinctive form of poetry, which relied on direct observation and the idiomatic, living speech of the local people.⁶⁰ As Jay Parini, one of Frost’s most astute and informative biographers, has explained, “It was in Derry that he began to listen keenly to the people around him, many of them farm laborers, and to catch their way of talking, their ‘sound postures’ as he described them....Frost began to favor strong simple verbs; he used a rough-hewn, flinty language that seemed to reek of the northern New England soil.”⁶¹

It is not unreasonable to believe that Frost shared his experiences of farm life with Chapin, the satisfaction and inspiration he took from living such a purposeful existence, as well as the importance it had in his art.⁶² Soon after his move to the Derry farm Frost was encouraged by a close friend to re-read Henry David Thoreau’s Walden (1854). Like many people who have read the book since its publication, he surely derived purpose, strength, and sustenance from such lines as its opening sentence, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”⁶³ It is possible that Frost in turn recom-

⁵⁹ Louis Mertins, Robert Frost: Life and Talks-Walking. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965): 58.

⁶⁰ Cited in Parini, 447.

⁶¹ Parini, 91.

⁶² In the late 1930s Chapin purchased a pre-Revolutionary house on a lot of land near Glen Gardner, New Jersey, which I believe further attests to Frost’s long-lasting influence. Like Frost, he planted a garden every spring “so the boys can have fresh vegetables,” as he once explained. Chapin maintained this small farm until the family moved to Toronto, Canada in 1969. Source: “James Chapin,” a 1940 newspaper story by an unidentified author in the files at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

⁶³ Henry David Thoreau, Walden. Originally published in 1854; reprinted in: Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau. (New York: Random House, 1950): 81.

mended Thoreau's masterpiece to Chapin, for that was the way of life he was searching for when he arrived on the Marvin farm in June, 1924.

Chapin painted a second portrait of Frost in 1929, and by that time both men had earned a significant measure of fame [fig. 1.3]: Frost was the pride of the Amherst faculty and Chapin was receiving critical and public acclaim for the Marvin series.⁶⁴ Although the circumstances that led to the portrait are unknown, Chapin went to Amherst in order to begin the painting but, being the methodical painter he was, it took him over a year to complete it. Long before Chapin put his brush to the canvas, he made numerous sketches of the poet's hands, his head, and his posture, which was his practice at the time. "I can't explain it very well," Chapin once said, "but it is the symbolic human gesture that interests me—not the gesture of the hands and feet but the carriage of the human body and the human head."⁶⁵ There were several such occasions when Chapin underscored the importance of this "symbolic human gesture" in his work, a concern that parallels Frost's concept of "sound postures," which he employed to convey the underlying character of his subjects. In this portrait Frost, dressed in a clean, yet rumpled, white shirt buttoned to the collar and gray slacks, is shown seated in a Windsor-style chair, his arms resting on the chair's arms, his posture erect and proud, like an enthroned monarch or cleric. There is a quiet intensity to his demeanor that suggests the presence of "wisdom coiled inside like a spring."⁶⁶ A pile of books—volumes of Frost's poetry—lie in disarray on a cloth-covered table, placed in an alcove behind the poet.

⁶⁴ Purchased by Amherst College in May, 1961, the portrait is presently located in the school's Robert Frost Library.

⁶⁵ "With Wisdom Coiled Inside" *Time* (May 19, 1961).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapin utilized a familiar format for this portrait, which was painted the same year he took leave of the Marvins. In terms of its overall composition it bears a resemblance to Thomas Eakins' portraits of clerics at the turn of twentieth century like that of *Sebastiano Cardinal Martinelli*, painted in 1902 [fig. 1.4]. Both artists placed their subjects in spare, spacious surroundings that are carefully defined, and although the likenesses of the subjects appear truthful, neither of them tells us anything about the personalities of the men represented. Although their eyes appear to be fixed on some object outside the picture frame, their minds or thoughts are elsewhere. Both subjects sit rigidly in their chairs. However, Cardinal Martinelli leans slightly backwards in a much taller chair. The most noticeable difference between the two works is that Frost is "cut off at the knees," so to speak, whereas Cardinal Martinelli has both feet planted firmly on the floor.

It is tempting, due to their many similarities, to see Eakins' portrait as a model for Chapin, which indeed it may have been, for he was surely familiar with Eakins' work and the formidable reputation he had achieved as a portraitist. Moreover, Eakins could have been yet another factor in Chapin's decision to "go native," for in an interview published in the Philadelphia Press in February, 1914 titled "Eakins Chats on Art of America" the senior artist recommended:

It would be far better for American art students and painters to study their own country and portray its life and types. To do that they must remain free from any foreign superficialities. Of course, it is good to go abroad to see the works of the old masters, but Americans must branch out into their own fields as they are doing it. They must strike out for themselves and only by doing this will they create a great and distinctly American art.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "Eakins Chats on Art of America." Philadelphia Press (February, 22, 1914); cited in William Innes Homer, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997): 249.

By the time of the second Frost portrait, Chapin was well acquainted with the city of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he would accept a teaching position in the late 1930s. Thus, it is entirely possible that Eakins too played a part in Chapin's future decision to study his own country. However, Frost was the more important influence in Chapin's art and life as his final portrait of the poet demonstrates.

"Young Robert Frost in New Hampshire," (James Cox Gallery, New York) was not, as the title suggests, painted from life as were the other two [fig. 1. 5]. It was begun approximately a year after Frost's death in 1963, and Chapin returned to the painting, off and on for the next eight years; he never completed it. Though heavily informed by the artist's memories of his friend and collaborator, the subject is drawn from one of Frost's most memorable works, titled "Birches," which appeared in Mountain Interval (1916), his third volume of poetry. Once again, we encounter Frost in the role of the farmer-poet, but here dressed in a spotless white shirt open at the collar to reveal the lean muscles of his neck and collarbone. Frost radiates strength and energy. He has paused in his stroll through a magnificent stand of slender white birches "on a sunny winter morning after a rain." The trees are loaded with ice deposited by a recent storm, but "the sun's warmth has caused them to shed crystal shells."⁶⁸ Frost grasps two saplings, one with each hand, like a man confined to a prison cell. His cold, clear, blue eyes meet the viewer's with an eerie candor. He cannot proceed, and neither can we. One of the birch saplings, a casualty of nature's

⁶⁸ Robert Frost, "Birches." Originally published in Mountain Interval, (1916); Reprinted in The Poetry of Robert Frost. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1975): 121.

wrath, is bent toward the ground, its branches weighted down by ice. It forms a barrier, and in effect distances us from the subject. Turning to Frost's poem we grasp the full meaning of the portrait.

The narrator of "Birches" has lived a full life, which he now realizes is drawing to a close. While out on a walk, he comes across a stand of birch trees and he begins to recall the indescribable sense of joy and freedom he once experienced as "a swinger of birches," and the ways in which this adolescent pastime had prepared him for life. Now aged and tired he laments:

I'd like to get away from earth for awhile....
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.⁶⁹

In Chapin's unfinished portrait, Frost, a professed atheist, exists somewhere beyond the earthly and spiritual realms; he inhabits an Eden of his own invention. As the poet made clear, heaven is not the ultimate destination for "a swinger of birches." Rather, paradise is a journey, an endless cycle of "going and coming back." Chapin's final portrait of Frost is a thoughtful and personal tribute to a most important friendship, a relationship that spanned more than half a century, beginning with their collaboration on North of Boston.

Frost's working title for his second volume of poetry was Farm Servants and Other People, which he found unsatisfactory for unknown reasons. It may have appeared too restrictive as it tends to impose a limitation of sorts, being more descrip-

⁶⁹ Ibid, 122.

tive of the characters one encounters rather than of a locality. On the other hand, the title North of Boston serves a dual purpose; it evokes a region, one without any clearly defined borders, as well as the people who dwell there. In his 1914 review of Frost's most recent work, the imagist poet Richard Aldington wrote, "He tells you a little or big incident in rather stumbling blank verse, places two or three characters before you, and then tells you another incident with fresh characters, making you more interested all the time, until at the end of the book you realize that in a simple, unaffected sort of way he has put before you the whole life of the people 'North of Boston.'"70

In the fall of 1914, Frost received a letter from New York publisher Henry Holt. Mrs. Holt, a native of Vermont, had been given a copy of the book by a friend. Won over by the poet's vision, she persuaded her husband to offer Frost a contract for the American rights to North of Boston, with an option on future work. Skeptical of its appeal to an American audience, the publisher authorized an initial printing of a meager one hundred-fifty copies, which, to their astonishment, quickly sold out. Thirteen hundred more copies were soon printed to meet the growing demand. Word spread, and a year later, after an additional four more printings, the book had attracted some 20,000 buyers, which was unheard of at the time for a volume of poetry.

The Frost family returned to the United States in 1915. The poet received a warm reception back in his homeland. He and his latest work were greeted by positive reviews from the critics and the financial support of his American admirers. His star in ascendancy, Frost returned to his other passion and purchased a farm outside

⁷⁰ Richard Aldington in the Egoist (July 1, 1914); Cited in Robert Frost: Selected Letters. ed. Lawrence Thompson. (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964): 92

Franconia, Vermont. Approximately a year later, Frost and Chapin met for the first time and began their collaboration for the second American edition and first illustrated edition of North of Boston, which was limited to five hundred copies and printed on special British hand-made paper bearing a distinctive watermark of a hammer and anvil. A plain gold-printed paper label with the title and the author's name decorated the blue-gray paper-covered boards.

Chapin produced fourteen illustrations for this volume consisting of fifteen poems.⁷¹ The drawings do not illustrate specific passages in the texts. Rather it appears that Chapin's objective was to evoke the locality and mood generated by Frost's poetry, as in "A Hundred Collars" [fig. 1. 6], a tale of false suspicion and fear, which takes place in a sordid hotel room near a train station in the wee hours of the morning. In the illustration he created for this poem, Chapin deposited the reader at the train station alone and in the dark of night. The headlight of an approaching train illuminates the darkened tracks and an eerie artificial light emanates from the windows of the nearby buildings. In Chapin's drawing for "A Servant to Servants" [fig. 1.7], the heroine, physically and emotionally exhausted

From cooking meals for hungry hired men
And washing dishes after them—from doing
Things over and over that just won't stay done⁷²

finds in nature an escape from the drudgery of her existence, as well as a reason for going on. She stands on a windswept hill overlooking a long narrow lake, its surface dazzling in the morning sun. A gentle wind rises up from the water and caresses her

⁷¹ All of the verses except for "After Apple-Picking" are accompanied by an illustration.

⁷² Robert Frost, "A Servant of Servants." North of Boston. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919): 66.

willowy frame like a ghostly lover. As her dreamlike demeanor reveals, she gives herself over to it. For a few brief moments they become one, releasing her from life's burden.

These two illustrations and ten others were rendered in pen and ink, attesting to the artist's confidence and competence as a draftsman, since it is difficult to either correct or disguise an error. Despite the sketch-like quality of the drawings, every line seems carefully considered and essential. A few illustrations, like "Mending Wall" and "The Death of the Hired Man," which make use of abstract imagery, take on the look of a woven tapestry [figs. 1.8 and 1.9], but here the warp and weft are composed of carefully drawn lines. The few natural forms employed in these illustrations have been abstracted. The hulking body of a man, the expressive shapes of the tree limbs, and the two poles of white that rise up through "Mending Wall" are indistinct and they help to foster moods or emotions that are in keeping with the narratives of the poems. The illustrations for "Home Burial" [fig. 1.10] and "The Black Cottage," while complementary to the others, are rendered in a noticeably different style. They appear to have been created with graphite, charcoal, and possibly an ink wash, suggested by their painterly qualities, the softness of their lines, and wide range of tones they possess. The mournful nude woman pictured in the illustration for "Home Burial," one of Chapin's most unusual and uninspired drawings, calls to mind the slender and attenuated figures one encounters in works by the English Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones and the American Symbolist Pamela Colman Smith.

Chapin, whose name appeared on the title-page of North of Boston just below the Frost's and on the page opposite his 1917 portrait of the poet, must have been es-

pecially proud of the role he played in bringing this special edition to completion. It was surely his most important work to date. Like Frost, Chapin too sensed that his career was finally beginning to take off, and at a most crucial time, for in 1917, the same year he received the commission to illustrate North of Boston, he married Abigail Forbes, a schoolteacher, in a civil ceremony in New York City. The union produced one child.⁷³ However, the marriage did not last, and by the time he set out for the New Jersey hills in 1924, Chapin, a divorced father, was once again alone.

An Epic Unfolds: James Chapin and the Marvin Family

Although it provided him with a living, Chapin's work as a commercial artist began to conflict with his desire to become a full-time painter. It consumed too much of his time and did not pay well enough; his financial resources were stretched to their limit and he had a child to support. Somehow he had managed to scrape together enough pictures for his first one-man show at the New Gallery in 1923, but it received little attention. He tried again the following year with the same results. Frustrated, Chapin decided to abandon New York City and his career as a commercial artist in order to devote himself full-time to painting. "It seemed," he later recalled, "that trying to be two people, the commercial artist concerned with making money and the artist trying to paint at odd times was proving to be beyond my strength. So I decided to leave New York, live in the country cheaply and give uninterrupted painting a

⁷³ James Forbes Chapin was born in New York City 23 July, 1919. He became a well-known as a drummer for several big bands, such as Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra, and as the author of Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer.

chance.” He would later describe this period as “one of the chief turning points in my life.”⁷⁴

Chapin closed his New York City studio, gathered together what painting materials he could carry and boarded a locomotive with no destination in mind. He did not travel far, no more than seventy-five miles. He disembarked the train at Stillwater, New Jersey, liking the name of sparsely-populated township. It is incorrect, as other writers have implied, that Chapin was a complete stranger to these parts, for Stillwater is not far from his boyhood home in West Orange, New Jersey. While he may not have been familiar with Stillwater specifically, he was well-acquainted with the region. In other words, Chapin knew where he was and what he was looking for. His first concern after leaving the train was acquiring suitable lodging, and he eventually found his way to the Marvin homestead, located in nearby Middleville; the place seemed ideal.⁷⁵ According to the artist, “I paid four bucks a month for the cabin and grew my own vegetables. I didn’t have to pay anything for models, because the whole Marvin family was glad to pose for me.”⁷⁶ However, that occurred only after the Marvins, who were initially, and understandably, suspicious and standoffish, had ample time to warm up to the stranger from the big city with art supplies strapped to his back.

The Marvin farm was located on Stillwater Road, approximately a fifteen-minute walk from the township of Middleville, Sussex County, New Jersey [fig.

⁷⁴ James Chapin cited in Christopher Hume, “James Chapin at Yaneff Galley” *Artmagazine* (February/March 1981): 49.

⁷⁵ Although 1910 and 1920 United States Census Records indicate that the Marvin farm was located in Stillwater Township, Don Robbins, a life-long resident, insists that it was located in Middleville.

⁷⁶ James Chapin quoted in “James Chapin’s Americana: A Native American Who Did Not Have to Go Native.” *Pictures on Exhibit* (March, 1940): 6.

1.11]. Middleville, originally known as Gin Point, and later as Centreville, lies about three miles north of Stillwater, and is located at the junction of Stillwater Road and Pond Brook Road. The kind of town one generally passes through on the way to somewhere else, Middleville lies between the townships of Stillwater and Swartswood, both of which were thriving small-town communities at the time of Chapin's arrival in 1924. Swartswood Lake drew crowds of vacationers during the summer months, many of the tourists wishing to escape the stifling heat of the large industrial cities. During daytime hours they could relax and take pleasure in such activities as boating on the cool, quiet lake waters; in the evenings they were pampered in any one of the many resorts and casinos that dotted the picturesque lakefront. Edward Webb, writing in the Historical Directory of Sussex County (1872), described nearby Middleville as a "small post village of about twenty or thirty inhabitants. It contains a hotel—the Mountain Brook House—and a store—Robbins' General Store—and a good-sized building, next door to the store, which has been leased at various times for different mechanical purposes."⁷⁷ Although the population had increased some by 1924, Middleville was much the same when Chapin arrived in the summer of that year [Fig. 1.12].⁷⁸

According to Don Robbins, of the third and last generation of the family to operate the store that he took over from his father in 1946, the Marvins had little interest in socializing and tended to keep to themselves.⁷⁹ Robbins, who was a child at the time of Chapin's residence on the Marvin farm, recalled that the Marvin brothers

⁷⁷ Edward Webb, The Historical Directory of Sussex County. (1872). Cited in by Wayne T. McCabe, Images of America Sussex County. (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2004):54

⁷⁸ Wayne T. McCabe and Kate Gordon, A Penny a View...an album of postcard view: Stillwater, N.J. (Newton, NJ: Historic Preservation Alternatives, Inc., 1995): 21.

⁷⁹ Interview with Don Robbins, January 10, 2005.

would amble down dusty Stillwater Road to the general store, a journey of a mile or so, for the necessities of life they could not raise on the farm, such as salt, sugar, and the like. George and Emmet were rarely accompanied by Ella, who appears to have stayed on the farm while the men went to town. Robbins remembered George as being a quiet man and Emmet as being the talker, who tended to ignore local happenings in favor of engaging in discussions on the Civil War. As Robbins stated, “His mind was always on the Civil War.”⁸⁰ Robbins also recalled that Chapin came to the store often and that he enjoyed sitting around the woodstove visiting with the locals.

A few surviving photographs show that the Marvin home was a large, two-story structure, with an attic story and gabled roof.⁸¹ It rested on a stone foundation constructed out of river-rock laid up in courses. A small porch, supported on stilts, was attached to the back of the house. If the home had ever been painted, the color had worn away years before. The front door of the Marvin home was flanked by a large window on each side, symmetrically arranged. The second story featured windows situated above those on the first floor, and another placed directly above the front door. Both sides of the house also had windows, one centered on the first floor and two on the second story. Since the house had no electricity, all of these openings were effective in providing the interior spaces with an abundance of natural light during the daylight hours.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Emmet was the last of the Marvin siblings to occupy the house. After his death the house and property were neglected and fell into disrepair. The house was condemned in 1973 by county officials as “unfit for human habitation.” Portions of the building were deemed structurally unsound due to rotting timbers. All or most of the windows and doors were broken or missing and the roof leaked with the result that portions of the floorboards were rotting. County officials argued that the dilapidated structure posed a danger to visitors and they ordered Emmet’s heirs to board up the home until its sale and demolition could take place. The county eventually foreclosed on the property due to nonpayment of taxes. The Marvin home and numerous other outbuildings were torn down in the late 1990s, when the new owners of the property constructed their home next door to the Marvin homestead.

Like most self-sufficient farms, the Marvin homestead was surrounded by a number of smaller structures, each with a specific purpose, such as barn, tool and wood sheds, a well-house, a chicken coop, and, since there was no indoor plumbing, the once familiar outhouse. One of the structures housed a still, which George and Emmet constructed and used for distilling moonshine. There was plenty of timber on the property for fueling it and the big wood cook-stove in the kitchen, which was also the principal source of heat for the house during the winter months. Water was drawn from a well, and likely carried into the house in an enamel-lined bucket, and sipped from a ladle dipped into the pail of cool water. There were several small cabins on the property that the Marvins rented out to the itinerant farm workers they employed occasionally; Chapin called one of these home for approximately five years.

The Marvin household experienced some difficult losses and important gains in the decade prior to Chapin's arrival. The 1910 United States Federal Census states that David B. Marvin (b. 1835), listed as the head of the household, and his wife Sarah Marvin (b. 1831) occupied the home with two of their three children: Ella, the oldest (b. 1866) and Emmet, the youngest (b. 1884). Their other son George (b. 1882) was married and lived close by with his wife Adda (b. 1889), daughter Edith (b. 1906), son Frank (b. 1908), and an infant daughter Margaret (b. 1909).⁸² Ten years later both parents were deceased, as was George's wife Adda and their daughter Margaret. George had moved out of the house he had shared with his wife and back into the family's home on Stillwater Road with his children Edith, Frank, and Ethel, who was born in 1912. Emmet, the youngest of the Marvin siblings, had taken over the

⁸² Thirteenth Census of the United States:1910 Population, Stillwater Township, Sussex County, New Jersey, p. 250

role of head of the household from his father. According to the 1920 census, he was the owner of the property and a farmer by occupation.⁸³ Ella never married. It appears that she assumed the role of female head of the household upon her mother's death and went from tending to her aged parents to caring for her younger brothers Emmet and George, as well as her nieces and nephew. Importantly, the census indicates that all three of the Marvin siblings possessed the abilities to read and write. They were not the uneducated hicks some early writers made them out to be. James Chapin, younger but close in age to both George and Emmet, became an integral part of this household. As his regionalist ally Grant Wood keenly observed some years later, "the Marvins, a plain American farm family... moved in upon his imagination and took possession of it."⁸⁴

Soon after his arrival Chapin set out to learn the lessons of farm life. The reticence the Marvins had initially exhibited toward their tenant faded away when Chapin began to contribute some of his daily labor to the maintenance of the farm, taking on such tasks as planting vegetables, chopping wood, and mucking out the stalls of the barn. He must have provided his adopted family with an unusual and ready source of entertainment through the pictures he sketched and painted of them and their lives. Moreover, they could count on Chapin to provide any one of them with an excuse now and then to take a break from their chores in order to serve as one of his models.

In his five years on the farm, during which he left rarely and only for short periods of time, Chapin recorded in numerous pencil sketches, watercolors, and fin-

⁸³ Fourteenth Census of the United States:1920 Population, Stillwater Township, Sussex County, New Jersey, p. 215

⁸⁴ Grant Wood, "James Chapin and the Marvins." [exhibition catalog] (New York:: Associated American Artists, 1940).

ished oil paintings every aspect of what had become his day-to-day existence. He produced penetrating portraits of the principal members of the Marvin family and a few itinerant farmhands. Chapin devoted canvases to such mundane activities as cutting down a tree with a two-handed crosscut saw, planting potatoes, cradling grain, and honing a scythe on a grindstone. He painted George and Emmet pausing to take a drink in the field, and fishing in a nearby stream. There were pictures of cows in the barnyard, horses grazing in a pasture, sheep at rest, and a sow suckling her offspring in a pen. A woodpile, a tumble-down corn crib, and year-old haystacks also appealed to his imagination and became subjects for his art.

Chapin surely realized that he was on to something big, that the work he was producing on the Marvin farm was important, for he took a few breaks from the farm in order to exhibit some of the canvases he produced there. In 1925 he was given his third one-man exhibition at the New Gallery in New York. The following year he showed some paintings at the Chicago Art Club, and the year after that saw yet another solo exhibition, this one at the Frank Rehn Gallery in New York. Chapin's work began to attract the notice of critics, who recognized that something fresh and wholly original had recently appeared on the American art scene. As one contemporary critic wrote of Chapin's new paintings, "These canvases are informed with humanity. In them are a sympathy and understanding that strip the scenes of the commonplace, and disclose beneath something of the essential values of human life and labor, so that the painting ceases to be accidental and particular but becomes charged with a universal significance."⁸⁵ However, the Marvins, as Chapin portrayed them and as many viewers recognized, were first and foremost real American farmers, simple upstanding

⁸⁵ Margaret Breuning, "A Young Painter of American Labor" *International Studio* (April, 1926): 77.

country folk, whose honest labor and sense of independence were representative of our nation's most fundamental and cherished values.

Chapin's magnificent portrait *Emmet, George and Ella Marvin* is the largest of the Marvin paintings at approximately five feet by six feet [fig. 1.13]; its size alone confers a sense of importance upon its subject. It is unusual in the history of American art in that it takes as its subject the three adult Marvin siblings, who are shown grouped around the kitchen stove. While representations of family members are one of the most common types of group portraiture, dating back to ancient Egypt, group portraits of adult siblings are rare, for this format was generally reserved for children, as in Joseph Whiting Stock's *The Farnum Children* (1855) [fig. 1.14]. As seen in both of these paintings, portraits of families do not always show a large number of family members. Sometimes specific relationships are singled out for artistic attention, as Chapin demonstrated in this portrait by not including the younger members of the Marvin household. Whatever the artist's principal objective may be, the family portrait originates from some conception of why a family is important. "A family," as Shearer West explains, "is a collective body of persons related legally, emotionally, or by blood, but this simple definition belies a range of different conceptions. Representations of the family give clues to what is significant about family life in a particular age and country."⁸⁶ Chapin surely had some greater purpose in mind when he painted this portrait of the Marvins, for, unlike most group portraits, it was not a

⁸⁶ Shearer West, *Portraiture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 112.

commissioned work. He sought to say something with this painting, which he exhibited often but never sold.⁸⁷

Chapin drew on his academic training for this portrait, in which Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin are arranged in a pyramid-like configuration and situated around the exquisitely rendered cast-iron wood cook stove—a symbol of familial warmth. As Chapin explained many years afterwards, he dispensed with his common practice of making preparatory sketches for the Marvin portraits, preferring instead to set up the canvas and portray the subjects as they were without any advance studies.⁸⁸ Perhaps due to her subordinate position in the Marvin household, Chapin placed Ella standing behind her younger brothers. Emmet occupies the wooden chair to the left and George the chair to the right. The placement of the three individuals takes on a sort of zigzag-like arrangement, introducing Emmet to the viewer first, then George, and finally Ella. The composition also leads the viewer's eyes from the front to the back of the room and from the back to the front. All three of the subjects assume informal poses that would minimize any movement or discomfort during the sittings. Emmet's right leg is crossed over his left; his right elbow and left hand rest on his knee causing his upper body to come forward; his chin rests on his slightly closed fist. George sits uncomfortably erect, both feet planted on the floor, which is constructed of wooden planks that have been worn smooth by years of use. His hands rest firmly on his knees. Ella stands immobile in the back of the room, her left elbow positioned on the stove's upper shelf, her right hand placed on her hip.

⁸⁷ This painting remained in the artist's collection until 1966 when it entered the New Jersey State Museum as a partial gift from the artist and his second wife Mary Chapin.

⁸⁸ James Chapin in a letter to the Montclair Art Museum, stamped April 10, 1974.

The close relationship that these people share is conveyed in their looks and manners. All three of the Marvin siblings possess clear blue eyes and engage the viewer with their direct gazes. However, their faces, lined with the creases and wrinkles that come with age and a hard life, are expressionless, their innermost feelings hidden behind masks of indifference. Nonetheless, they appear strong, proud, and even heroic. All three sitters possess large working hands that have been sculpted and disfigured by their manual labors. They also wear similar attire. George and Emmet are portrayed in blue denim shirts buttoned to the collar and mail-order canvas pants rolled at the cuff, which are held up by sweat-stained suspenders that have lost some their elasticity. Their worn leather work boots are as expressive of the wearers' daily toil as are those venerated in *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) by Vincent van Gogh a generation or so earlier (Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam). In fact, one senses in Chapin's paintings of the Marvins the same admiration van Gogh expressed in his portrayals of impoverished peasants and coalminers, whose ways of life he knew well. Yet in contrast to van Gogh's scruffy miners, George and Emmet are well-groomed, their hair recently cut; and though George sports a neatly trimmed brown mustache, the brothers are also clean-shaven. Ella wears a blue collarless long-sleeve shirt similar in color to the denim shirts worn by her younger brothers; the color of her skirt or apron approximates the hue of their canvas trousers. Ella's hair is pulled back from her face in order to expose her facial features, which Chapin has deliberately hardened. She appears more masculine than feminine, and thus similar in respect to some of the women portrayed by Thomas Eakins a generation earlier, as in *Mrs. Elizabeth Duane Gillespie* (1895, Philadelphia Museum of Art). The Marvins

possess a sense of solidity, a sturdiness that caused Grant Wood to describe them as “strong and solid as boulders.”⁸⁹

Chapin’s carefully calculated composition suggests that the Marvins lived an austere lifestyle for, aside from the chairs, the wood-burning stove, and the remarkable still-life of kitchen objects arranged on its surface, the kitchen is noticeably free of clutter. The brown-gray walls are stripped bare; no paintings, calendars, or family pictures are to be seen and thus distract the viewer’s attention away from the sitters. And yet, that exquisitely rendered still-life composed of a speckled brown ceramic teapot, a large white ceramic cup, and a granite-ware coffee pot placed on the stove’s upper shelf attracts our attention; so too do the large cast-iron pot and teapot sitting on its cooking surface, which were generally used to maintain a limited supply of hot water in the house as well as add some humidity to the air, for wood-burning stoves can quickly dry out a room and its contents. Like many group portraits Chapin’s *Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin* represents a relationship that operates on more than one level. While its function can be private and personal, like the majority of family portraits, it can take on greater cultural significance when it enters the public realm, which Chapin’s painting did.

Eager to exhibit the work he had produced in self-imposed isolation over the previous five years, and seeking new challenges, Chapin left the Marvin farm in 1929 and returned to the city. His monumental painting of the Marvin family made its public debut in December of that year at the Frank Rehn Gallery on Fifth Avenue. The solo exhibition was made up almost entirely of works Chapin had produced on the Marvin farm and the show garnered a significant amount of attention in the popular

⁸⁹ Wood, “James Chapin and the Marvins.”

press. The art critic for The New York Post wrote, “The American scene is directly and uncompromisingly set before you, yet with a touch of sentiment that belongs to American tradition and heritage.”⁹⁰ In February the following year, Chapin submitted several canvases to the Carnegie Institute’s Twenty-Eighth International Exhibition in Pittsburgh. *Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin* drew large crowds of admirers and was voted the Popular Prize, as the public’s favorite painting. Chapin’s professional career had finally taken off. His five years of exile from the New York art world had been worth the cost and over the next decade he exhibited his work widely. In 1932 alone he participated in eight exhibitions, and before the decade was out Chapin was given an impressive nineteen one-man shows. The Association of American Artists mounted a retrospective exhibition of his work in 1940, which again trained a spotlight on the Marvin years. In the essay he wrote for the catalog that accompanied the show, Grant Wood stated that the paintings on display with their “stern honesty, solid technical construction, and infinite human sympathy” placed Chapin “in the front rank of American painters.”⁹¹

In December, 1940 handsome color-lithographed reproductions of Chapin’s *Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin* were mailed out as “Christmas cards” by the Summerill Tubing Company, a seamless-steel tubing manufacturer then located in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania.⁹² The parties responsible for producing this extraordinary and impressive greeting card are unknown. However, its sophisticated design suggests that it was an in-house publication. A letter printed on fine parchment and

⁹⁰ Review cited in “New York Season.” The Art Digest (1 February, 1930): 17.

⁹¹ Wood, “James Chapin and the Marvins.”

⁹² Summerill Tubing Company is still in business. However, it is now located in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. The business has been sold several times since 1940 and any information regarding the company’s unusual Christmas card has been lost.

signed by R. R. Lawson, Summerill's Executive Vice-President, read: "We want you to have a copy of the 'card' we are sending to our many friends in the trade and feel sure you will enjoy possessing one. Our compliments and best wishes go with it." The lithograph, suitable for framing, was enclosed in a large card of hand-made gray paper that measured thirteen inches square. Printed on the front of the card in classic Roman typeface and silver ink was the phrase "GOOD PEOPLE." The card was packaged in a large envelope constructed of heavy paper, used to protect the print and documents inside, and mailed out to Summerill's customers.

How Chapin came to paint Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin was told on the right-hand page, where Grant Wood's essay for the AAA retrospective exhibition was reproduced in full. Certain that the people receiving this elegant greeting would grasp the content and significance of Chapin's painting, the card's designers nonetheless offered a brief interpretation of the portrait, which is worth citing in full:

Many at Christmas time, spread the spirit of goodfellowship far beyond the circle of their friends and families. Often strangers, passing by, exchange cheerful, heartfelt greetings.

But strangers are only strangers until we know them. In presenting to you the portraits of three people, it is hoped that you will have the pleasure the artist had in coming to know them well—their simple tasks, their earnest endeavors, their enduring worth.

The picture is one in which the artist has sought to paint portraits not merely of outward forms but of inner character. Close study, or even a glance, shows that these people are GOOD people.

Important now is that people like these three can be found in any thousands of places within the borders of our nation—in the homes of our cities, in the mills of our industry, on the farms of our countryside. Their character, expressed in everyday actions, will be our guide as we band ourselves together to preserve our heritage.

Should challenge come to our American way of life, we can rely on the honesty and goodness-of-heart that reside in our people. Look at these portraits of members of the Marvin family and picture anyone succeeding in taking from them their love of liberty!

Importantly, the American way of life had been under siege for over a decade when this card appeared and in December, 1940 the nation was still finding its way out of the economic disaster wrought by the Great Depression. As Chapin's portrait suggests, the Marvins had weathered this latest storm. However, the war clouds that had been gathering in Europe and Asia for several years indicated that another, and perhaps more serious, threat to the nation's security loomed on the horizon. As this card makes clear, the resolute and stalwart Marvins were representative of those men and women across the nation who would willingly take up the fight to defend our much-cherished freedoms, should it come to that.

As this document demonstrates, Chapin's portrait of the Marvins did indeed transcend the particular, the specific. This rugged independent American farm family came to represent others like them scattered across the United States. Such people could be found not only on family farms but also laboring in the factories of the large industrial cities, as seen in Gerrit Beneker's *Rufus Payne*, 1921 [fig. 1.15]. The Marvins became symbolic of a simple yet noble way of life, one lived earnestly and honestly. And yet, as curator Maureen O'Brien noted, "Chapin was not painting as one infused with a narrow sense of nationalism, although this seemed to be the trend of realists in the twenties and thirties."⁹³ In Chapin's eyes, the Marvins represented the ideal farm family and by extension the ideal American; they personified a strength and integrity that he believed were inherent in those who worked the land. As

⁹³ Maureen C. O'Brien, "James Chapin: The Marvin Years." (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 1974).

O'Brien further explained, "Their quality is basic to the Americans who founded the country as much as it belongs to those who endured the harsh years of the Depression. But this is a trait that goes beyond national and regional boundaries. Chapin does not adopt provincialism or choose the complacent optimism of regionalist sentiment, and for this reason he differs from the realist painters who followed, notably Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood."⁹⁴

As Grant Wood observed, Chapin was "conquered" by the Marvin family.⁹⁵ His admiration for them and their way of life is written in the marks he made upon the canvas, the brushstrokes he used to delineate their prideful postures, worn faces, and raw-boned hands. Importantly, Chapin did not idealize the Marvins, nor are they the objects of satire, as occasionally seen in the works of Grant Wood and some other Regionalists. In Chapin's eyes, the Marvins were more than simple New Jersey farmers struggling to make ends meet. They represented a particular type of American, their lives embodying bedrock American values.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Wood, "James Chapin and the Marvins."

Chapter Two

‘A Servant to Servants’:

James Chapin’s *Miss Ella Marvin*

Bless you, of course you are keeping me from work,
But the thing of it is, I need to *be* kept.
There’s work enough to do—there’s always that;
But behind is behind. The worst you can do
Is set me back a little more behind.
I shan’t catch up in this world, anyway.
I’d *rather* you’d not go unless you must.

-Robert Frost⁹⁶

Ella Marvin, the eldest of the Marvin siblings, was the first member of the clan to accept Chapin’s offer to sit for a portrait [fig. 2.1]. She was approximately fifty-nine years old and as the title, *Miss Ella Marvin*, indicates, she was unmarried. She was, to use the terminology of the day, an “old maid.”⁹⁷ Ella lived most of her life on the Marvin farm, rarely venturing beyond its borders except to visit neighbors and family living nearby. As a young woman she cared for her aged parents and after their deaths, she tended to her siblings and their children. Despite her decision to remain in a state of “single-blessedness,” Ella was the female head of the Marvin household and thus the domestic responsibilities of farm life fell directly upon her shoulders. Like any farmer’s wife, Ella prepared the family’s daily meals, as well as

⁹⁶ Robert Frost. “A Servant to Servants,” *North of Boston* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1919): 71-72.

⁹⁷ Norton Juster, *So Sweet the Labor: Rural Women in America, 1865-1895* (New York: Viking Press, 1979): 243. The terms “old maid” and “single-blessedness” are taken from a letter written by a farmer’s wife to *The Household*, a woman’s journal, which is reproduced in Juster’s text.

those for itinerant farmhands and boarders like Chapin. Additionally, she performed a variety of dull and repetitive household chores related to cooking, cleaning, and laundry. She tended the family's vegetable garden and raised young domesticated farm animals, such as chicks, calves, and piglets. On certain occasions she would assume the role of nurse or doctor too. Like the farmer's wife who narrates Robert Frost's "A Servant to Servants," Ella must have welcomed distractions now and again that afforded a break in her daily routine; Chapin's offer to paint her portrait surely provided her with such an opportunity. It is one of the most significant pictures Chapin produced during his tenure on the Marvin farm. While it is a likeness of Ella Marvin it is, perhaps most importantly, a straightforward portrait of an American farm woman. In spite their great numbers and their vital role in the maintenance and success of the family farm such women were rarely depicted by American artists.

Approximately ninety percent of the American people lived on family farms at the conclusion of the Civil War; sixty percent still lived there in 1900, and thus American farm women constituted a majority of the female population.⁹⁸ However, they are among the most underrepresented of all Americans in standard histories. In part this reflects gaps in the documentary record and yet, as recent scholarship in this area has demonstrated, there are numerous resources from which to construct histories of American farm women, such as public records, oral histories, personal letters and diaries. According to Julia Hornbostel, "American farm women have left a more substantial record of their life and work experiences than we may think from reading the usual histories of America. But because women in the past were seldom profes-

⁹⁸ Julia Hornbostel, "This Country's Hard on Women and Oxen: A Study of Images of Farm Women in American Fiction," *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures* Wava G. Haney and Jane B. Knowles, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988): 117.

sional historians, their accounts were rarely in the form of traditional histories. Instead they were in genres more familiar to them, such as letters and diaries, autobiographies, novels, and poetry.”⁹⁹ The problem is that too few academics have taken an interest in this material. John Faragher is correct when he states, “Our problem is not so much discovering new evidence as knowing what to do with what we have already.”¹⁰⁰ As Faragher explains, until recently the personal narratives of American farm women have been dismissed by academics as “pots and pans” history; he writes, “Historians have not heard rural women because they have listened to the powerful, not the powerless.”¹⁰¹ The problem has been one of deafness, not inarticulateness, according to Faragher.

Though farm women are rarely seen in the visual arts, they appear frequently in American literature, which has become one of the most important resources for constructing a history of women on the farm. Fictionalized accounts of American farm women were a prevalent theme in American literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Julia Hornbostel has argued, the portraits of rural women encountered in American fiction are, with few exceptions, realistic and therefore can be considered an important source of knowledge regarding the experiences of farm women, such as Ella Marvin. “Although literature is not history,” Hornbostel explains, “it can be a good source of knowledge and companion to history. By surveying an extensive body of fiction on a particular topic, one becomes aware of the feelings, actions, and interactions of people in a particular world. Both history and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ John Mack Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America,” *American Quarterly* (Winter, 1981): 538.

¹⁰¹ Faragher, 538.

literature begin with selected facts and are shaped by their recorder. Both are important sources of knowledge.”¹⁰² Hornbostel’s study is important, for it shows that there are indeed a significant number of novels and short stories from this time period that delve into the lives and experiences of farm women. As she explains, there are several reasons for this. First, farming is a job that women do at home within the family unit. Secondly, it is a job for which women generally have received no monetary compensation, perpetuating a long-held social attitude concerning what is suitable work for women. Finally, farm work is compatible with those traditional female nurturing roles of planting, tending, and bringing to harvest. “So in spite of the fact that farm work is extremely hard and dirty,” Hornbostel states, “it has been considered appropriate for women to do—and as a fictional topic, it has offered much opportunity for praise, admiration, or warning for readers.”¹⁰³

Fictional accounts of rural women and their lives appear to the real-life narratives encountered in monthly newspapers like The Household, which began publishing in 1868 with a circulation of 10,000; sixteen years later the readership had surpassed 70,000.¹⁰⁴ Though few in number, such journals are important for they provide a history of women’s experiences on the farm written by their own hands. As Norton Juster has explained in his study of this literature, a typical agricultural magazine of the time like The American Agriculturalist, which was aimed primarily at men, “would contain market reports, seasonal work schedules, innumerable articles on tools, techniques, horticultural advances, descriptions of farm operations, and a range of technical inquiries and answers. There might be a page or two directed to

¹⁰² Hornbostel, 117.

¹⁰³ Hornbostel, 109-110.

¹⁰⁴ See Juster, 1.

women or children but these...displayed little range and even less concern for the larger issues of life.”¹⁰⁵ In contrast, newspapers like The Household

“would range not only over those subjects that were the special province of women—cleaning, mending, cooking, food preservation, care of children, etiquette, etc.—but would offer also an impressive compass of articles on the home, its planning, furnishing, and influence on health. There were also articles on medicine, gardening, reading, educational opportunities, and amusements, history, reminiscences, philosophy and world affairs, as well as a selection of poetry, fiction, music scores, and lyrics.”¹⁰⁶

Importantly, the newspaper published a surprisingly large selection of letters written by farm women on every imaginable subject. As Juster is careful to point out, publications like The Household were also important in that they helped to ease the sense of isolation many farm women experienced and wrote about in their correspondence.

In the literature from this period, be it fictional or real-life narratives, the farmer’s wife is represented either as a civilizing force or as a help-mate. The latter focused on her essential domestic duties, which were vital to a family’s survival and often contrasted with the life of urban women. As Norton Juster writes, “While not all farmer’s wives of the period were burdened, ill-used, unhappy, tired, and sick—often to the point of decline or insanity—the fact remains that many of them did pass their lives in this soul-destroying context.”¹⁰⁷ Whatever part of the country they inhabited, the role of farm women was clearly defined and their opportunities were decidedly limited. As the depressed and isolated farmer’s wife in Frost’s “A Servant to Servants” describes in the simplest of terms, the amount of work she contributes to the maintenance of the family’s farm more than fills her days and consumes all of her

¹⁰⁵ Juster, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Juster, 131.

mental and physical strength. As she laments, there is no such thing as set working hours for the farmer's wife since she is expected always to be on call.¹⁰⁸ One suspects that Ella Marvin's life was not much different. The idea that men and women shared equally in the labors of farm life is complete fiction, according to Faragher. As he argues, when contrasted to her husband's obligations and responsibilities, the contributions of the farmer's wife toward the management and productivity of the farm were unquestionably greater. He quotes John C. Campbell, who wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, "The saying 'a woman's work is never done' is much truer generally than 'man works from sun to sun.'"¹⁰⁹

Representations of farm women are less prevalent in American art, yet when such women do appear, depictions of them tend to focus on their role as help-mate. Such is the case in a series of paintings Winslow Homer produced around 1875. Homer maintained a studio in New York during the Civil War and resided there during the 1870s. However, he exhibited little interest in portraying urban life. Instead, Homer roamed the countryside and found the subject matter for his paintings in rural Pennsylvania, upstate New York, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and the coastal resorts of New Jersey. It was during this period that Homer began to paint pictures of young rural women performing a variety of daily domestic chores. Homer, much like Chapin a half-century later, thumbed his nose at the conventions of art, and thus he received unfavorable notice from critics during the late 1860s and early 1870s. However, by the close of the 1870s they had warmed up to Homer, and specifically to his rural subjects. As an anonymous reviewer for the Art Journal wrote,

¹⁰⁸ Frost, 64-66.

¹⁰⁹ Faragher, 541.

“He is wholly in sympathy with the rude and uncouth conditions of American life...he likes the men, the women, the boys, and the girls, of the rustic by-ways of our land—and he likes them as they are, awkward in dress, spare in form, tanned and freckled by the sun....”¹¹⁰ Similar things were said of Chapin’s Marvin series upon their debut.

Homer explored specific aspects or duties of farm women, often devoting several canvases to the same theme, as in *The Dinner Horn*, of which there are four versions dating from 1870 to 1873. In an early rendering of this theme Homer depicted an attractive young woman, seen from the rear, blowing into a trumpet to call farm workers to the midday meal [fig. 2.2]. She has stepped out of the house and into the warm sunshine wearing an immaculate white dress. A gentle breeze has caught the fine material of her clothing and wraps it about her body, revealing her graceful form. She holds the horn to her mouth with her right hand; her left hand rests on her hip. She takes a deep breath into her lungs and sounds the horn. There is no question that Homer idealized his subject, for in her dress and gesture this young woman looks more like a goddess from classical antiquity than a farmer’s wife or daughter. She may be, as Randall C. Griffin describes, the American equivalent to one of Millet’s young peasant girls.¹¹¹ However, her slender figure and form-fitting dress, as well as the tantalizing glimpse of petticoat and ankle she offers the viewer make her, as Nicolai Cikovsky observes, the rural—though by no means rustic—inland counterpart of

¹¹⁰ Cited in: Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996): 95.

¹¹¹ Randall C. Griffin, *Winslow Homer: An American Vision* (New York: Phaidon Press, Inc., 2006): 66.

the bathing figures Homer depicted during the same decade in works like *Eagle Head, Manchester, Massachusetts* (1870).¹¹²

Homer portrayed a farmer's wife gathering eggs for the morning meal in *Fresh Eggs* (1874), a farmer's daughter caring for an ill hatchling in a delicate watercolor titled *The Sick Chicken* (1874), and he devoted several canvases to milkmaids as seen in *Milking Time*, 1875 [fig. 2.3]. Yet, in this painting the subject is not women's work but rather the young boy who ignores the woman's request for help with the task indicated by the title. The boy is caught in a daydream, possibly imagining a life beyond the confines of the farm, which the milkmaid will likely never know. Homer's images of farm life appealed to the critics due in part to what they perceived as an unvarnished record of the real world. However, as Pierce Rice has argued, Homer's pictures are the most keenly designed of any American painter, so that the notion of purely factual reporting on his part is without substance.¹¹³ Moreover, the vision of rural America that Homer conveyed in his pictures from the 1870s was one of effortless farming, the daily tasks of farm life managed by women and children in a picnic-like atmosphere. According to Rice, "His [Homer's] little figures in contemporary garb breathe far more Hellenic air than all the toga-clad Columbias and Spirits of Transportation or Electricity that, from the 1890s on, were to flow from the brushes and chisels of a later generation."¹¹⁴

Chapin, much like Homer, laid out his compositions with much care and skill, as demonstrated in *Miss Ella Marvin*. In this portrait the subject's pyramidal form is

¹¹² Cikovsky, 109.

¹¹³ Pierce Rice, *Man as Hero: The Human Figure in Western Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1987): 100.

¹¹⁴ Rice, 107.

set against the rectilinear lines of the wood cook stove. Importantly, Chapin did not idealize his subject, as Homer often did, for he sought to create a candid and down to earth representation of an American farm woman. Chapin portrayed Ella seated quietly in the kitchen, her sphere of influence. She assumes a pose reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's famed *Mona Lisa* (c. 1500). Like Leonardo's young noble woman, Ella is portrayed in a three-quarter length pose, her body shifted slightly to the left, her hands resting quietly in her lap, the left hand placed on the right. Yet, in contrast to Leonardo's pampered and refined lady, Ella's hands are noticeably larger and rougher, their coarseness testifying to age and to damage wrought by daily domestic chores. Ella's simple attire, a feminine version of the working man's blue denim shirt buttoned modestly to the collar, is also indicative of her labor and station in life. The nine buttons that cross Ella's ample bosom direct the viewer's attention to her face, which is noticeably free of any age-defining wrinkles. Ella's gray hair has been combed back from the face and gathered in a small bun at the top of the head to reveal her chiseled facial features, which tend to conceal or obscure her femininity. Moreover, Ella's countenance is as expressionless as her clear blue eyes, which meet the viewer's directly. Unlike Leonardo's young woman who displays a demure smile, Ella appears decidedly stern; she is portrayed as a no-nonsense kind of woman, the type of individual who does not suffer fools gladly, which could be attributed to the popular misconception that farm men and women tend to be suspicious of strangers and taciturn in their character.¹¹⁵

The broken brushwork and limited palette of blues and grays Chapin utilized in this composition are indicative of Cézanne's influence, which Chapin was still at-

¹¹⁵ Faragher, 553.

tempting to assimilate into his own evolving style. Like Cézanne, Chapin used color to provide the painting with structure, helping to define such elements as spatial depth and the solidity of the figure. Additionally, the principal forms of the painting are constructed of small blocks or patches of color laid side by side with minimal blending, in a manner borrowed from Cézanne. As a commentator for The Christian Science Monitor wrote of the portrait upon its debut in 1926, "...the structure of both background and the figure must be recognized as among the most convincing of any contemporary work. The stove is built by the painter with obvious depth, and a figure of solidity and amplitude is constructed inside of clothes which have their spatial validity. As craftsmanship it is a masterpiece of three-dimensional painting: as a human document it is singularly appealing."¹¹⁶

A comparison can be made between Chapin's portrait of Ella Marvin and Cézanne's *Woman with a Coffeepot* c. 1895 [fig. 2.4]. To begin, both works are paintings that feature domestics who have taken a break from their household duties to pose for a picture. While Chapin's sitter is identified, Cézanne's remains anonymous. Both women are modestly dressed in home-spun blue garments that may signify their working-class status. However, they are imbued with a sense of monumentality. The hands of both women are noticeably coarse and testify to their daily labors. Their faces appear equally rough, though dignified. As Linda Nochlin writes, Cézanne's domestic "confronts the viewer ramrod straight with no nonsense—and no rosary, either—just a good, plain coffeepot, cup, and spoon, objects as assertively vertical as the sitter herself."¹¹⁷ Ella Marvin is represented similarly, though in Chapin's paint-

¹¹⁶ "James Chapin, American Painter." The Christian Science Monitor. (May 29, 1926): no page numbers.

¹¹⁷ Linda Nochlin, Cézanne's Portraits (Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska, 1996): 24.

ing a round cast iron kettle replaces the cylindrical coffeepot, and rotundity replaces verticality. Whereas Cézanne's sitter is positioned more frontally, both figures have a pyramidal structure, which the artists have set against a rectilinear backdrop that accentuates their volume. In Cézanne's painting the woman is placed before a grid of rectangles that make up the cupboard doors and in Chapin's canvas *Ella Marvin* is seated in front of the wood cook stove composed of architectonic lines and shapes. Both figures look out of the canvas but only *Ella Marvin* confronts the viewer directly with her clear blue eyes. By contrast, the eyes of Cézanne's sitter are dark and opaque denying the sitter subjectivity. Lionello Venturi wrote of Cézanne's domestic servant that she "gives the impression of a grandiose force of nature. She is firmly rooted like a powerful tower."¹¹⁸ Venturi's words can be used to describe Chapin's *Miss Ella Marvin* as well. However, Chapin's painting is a portrait, a likeness of a specific individual. Conversely, Cézanne's painting is, first and foremost, a formalist exercise, the unidentified woman having no less and no more importance than any other object in the composition.

Importantly, Chapin placed his sitter's triangular form against the rectilinear framework of the cook stove, evoking a sense of stability, which was an essential quality of the farmer's wife. As Juster explains, "...the rural farm woman nurtured, sustained, and consoled. She maintained order and tranquility and was the fixed point of reference in a chaotic and uncertain world. Tempering and mediating the shocks and demands of family life, she was the armature of well-being—dispensing hospitality; nursing the sick and hurt; serving up food and cheer, and love; providing moral

¹¹⁸ Lionello Venturi cited in Françoise Cachin et al. *Cézanne* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996): 403.

and cultural guidance.”¹¹⁹ Chapin surely utilized the wood cook stove for its symbolic purposes as well, for it makes a direct reference to some of the work performed by farm women like Ella Marvin, as seen in Grant Wood’s *Dinner for Threshers* (1934) and Doris Lee’s *Thanksgiving* (1936).

In Wood’s painting, whose subject was drawn from the artist’s memories of threshing dinners he experienced as a young boy growing up in Iowa in the late 1890s, four women prepare a noon meal for a large threshing crew of hungry men dressed in denim or flannel shirts and wearing blue bib overalls [fig. 2.5]. However, the women preparing the meal in the kitchen on a large ornate wood cook stove occupy only a quarter of the entire composition at the far right because the subject of the painting is the communal repast enacted in the center of the canvas, not its preparation. Conversely, Doris Lee situates the viewer inside a busy farm kitchen where a number of women perform a variety of tasks in preparation for a holiday meal [fig. 2.6]. One woman, most likely the farmer’s wife, is shown at the wood stove basting the turkey. A young woman, possibly her daughter, rolls out biscuits at the kitchen table while another woman collects serving pieces from the china cabinet in the background. A woman wearing eyeglasses and an apron dashes into the kitchen carting a basket loaded with a variety of vegetables for the feast; the woman behind her appears to be removing her hat and coat in order to lend a much needed hand. Lee’s paintings of farm life are significant, for they depict many of the contributions women made to the management and success of the family farm; moreover, they were painted from a woman’s perspective.

¹¹⁹ Juster, 13.

Lee's mother was a country school teacher who had been born into a family of farmers. Moreover, Lee's grandmothers and great aunts—all of them farmers' wives—were always making things that fascinated her, painting pictures, embroidery, carving frames and bedposts, quilting, and nursing a great variety of plants and flowers. Drawing upon those fond memories Lee produced one of the most comprehensive series of paintings that depict women's experiences on the farm. In a painting titled *Farmer's Wife* Lee depicted a farm woman and two of her children seated at a table loaded with produce to be sold to people passing down the road at the left. Her husband, driving a tractor, plows a field in the distance. Like many farm women, she is selling the extra produce she grew to increase the family's income. Often the sale of the women's garden produce or poultry—to individual buyers or local stores for cash or credit—provided the only income the family may have had. The sale of butter also provided many farm families with a dependable income, and like nearly all domestic duties, the making and selling of this commodity was generally the responsibility of the farmer's wife.¹²⁰

One of the first works Chapin created after his move to the Marvin farm is titled *Woman Churning* [fig.2.7], which was possibly inspired by the many pictures of a woman standing at a butter churn produced by Jean-François Millet in the mid-nineteenth century. Although this work could be described as a group portrait since it depicts three members of the Marvin clan, it is the activity of making butter that is the painting's subject. The woman in the foreground wearing a full-body apron and bon-

¹²⁰ Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 75-113. The author provides a detailed analysis of the economics of the butter trade among farm wives and although she investigates a time period that predates this study, the sale of butter provided many farm families with a reliable cash income well into the twentieth century.

net on her head is most certainly Ella, who is shown performing one of the many repetitive and time-consuming tasks that were her responsibility, churning butter. While such labor testifies to the Marvin's self-sufficient way of life, it is also evidence of Ella's many contributions to the home. George Marvin, recognizable in his brown mustache, felt hat, and uniform of blue denim shirt and canvas pants, stands behind Ella and appears to be engaged in some kind of work with his hands. George's adolescent daughter, Edith, identifiable from the pink dress she wears in *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* [see chapter four], is seen at the right.

Most of the work that rural women performed, such as churning butter, was sheer drudgery. As Norton Juster writes "It was endless, repetitive work, a constant cycle of doing and redoing, making and remaking, a farmer's wife running as fast as she could in order to stay in the same place, but always striving to make that place perfection."¹²¹ Moreover, farm women worked far longer than necessary for either their own or even their children's subsistence so that men might be freed from such labor to pursue other, non-productive activities. According to John Faragher, "Men's responsibilities allowed them to lay aside their plows or flails for the day, especially in slack seasons, and ride out to visit a neighbor or frequent the village."¹²² But women like Ella Marvin, with their constant responsibilities at home, could not be so casual. Even in more densely settled areas a walking visit to neighbors could take an entire morning or afternoon, and in the division of farm labor this could not be counted as productive time but rather time away from domestic duties. Carolyn Sachs, tracing the etymology of the word "domestic," notes that this type of labor is

¹²¹ Juster, 131.

¹²² Faragher, 548.

forced upon the worker by others, and as she explains, “the major focus is on confinement.”¹²³ While domestic labor could simply be defined as work done in the home, the primary meaning of domestic implies forced confinement or lack of freedom. As Sachs argues, “Women’s domestic duties do not simply involve work that must be done in the home, but seem to imply confinement to the home.”¹²⁴ This sense of confinement contributed to the sense of isolation and loneliness expressed by many farmers’ wives in the literature of the period. Often they were separated from their kin, especially if they accompanied their husbands to another region. But even if they did not move far, they were often isolated because of bad roads, lack of ability or time to correspond, and a lack of other means of communication. Many had no neighbors—or no compatible ones—and many had little long-term emotional support from their husbands.¹²⁵

The land itself could engender and amplify feelings of separation and isolation. However, in the 1930s and 1940s, as the American economy shifted from agriculture to industry and manufacturing, the sense of seclusion associated with the family farm began to take on romantic or nostalgic overtones, as seen in cover illustrations John Falter created for The Saturday Evening Post. In compositions like *Amber Waves of Grain* (September 8, 1945), *Waiting for the School Bus in Snow* (February 1, 1947), and *Muddy Walk Home* (May 13, 1950) [figs. 2.8-2.10], Falter presented an idealized view of farm life often seen from a child’s perspective, which was ultimately a reflection of his own childhood experiences. Similarly, his colleague at The

¹²³ Carolyn E. Sachs, *The Invisible Farmers: Women in Agricultural Production* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983): 45. Sachs cites the definition of domestic as “having the character or position of the inmate of a house; housed.” Other applicable definitions include “of or belonging to the home, house, or household.”

¹²⁴ Sachs, 47.

¹²⁵ Hornbostel, 110.

Saturday Evening Post John Clymer, produced many covers extolling the virtues of rural America, such as *Belgium Horse Farm* (October 8, 1949) and *Snow on the Farm* (December 22, 1954), both of which are set in hill country, the type of landscape inhabited by the Marvin family [figs. 2.11 & 2.12].

The sense of isolation that afflicted many farm women like Ella Marvin is portrayed rather bluntly in a number of paintings created by Dale Nichols, such as *Company for Supper* and *Come to Supper*, both from 1939 [figs. 2.13 & 2.14]. In Nichols' nostalgic renderings of rural America, which make use of similar compositional elements like red barns, grain elevators, and A-framed houses, the farmer's wife is generally seen far in the distance and most often standing in the doorway to the house, her activities apparently confined to the domestic environment. Nichols was raised on a grain and livestock farm in Nebraska and his paintings of rural America are a reflection of the years he spent growing up there.

Although farm women, such as those seen at a distance in Nichol's pictures, spent the majority of their lives in a state of confinement due largely to their domestic responsibilities, many of them received support in overcoming feelings of isolation through networks composed of women united by kinship and or friendship that often developed in local areas.¹²⁶ Personal correspondence also offered many farm women a lifeline to the outside world, as exemplified in Frost's poem "A Servant to Servants," which takes the form of a letter written by a farmer's wife. The narrator of this disheartening tale finds some solace in the time she has taken away from her duties to compose the letter. In a small watercolor from 1939 titled *Thank God for Mail* [fig. 2.15], artist Stan Backus depicted a farmer's wife who has walked down the dusty

¹²⁶ Faragher, 553.

road to the mailbox in order to retrieve the mail. A few dilapidated structures line the road. Grassland and pastures, one filled with grazing cattle, extend out in all directions. There are no neighbors to be seen. The woman is so excited to receive mail that she opens the letter and reads its contents before returning to the house. In a painting titled *Letter from Overseas* that John Falter created as a cover illustration for the May 8, 1943 edition of The Saturday Evening Post [fig. 2.16], a farm wife has walked the rutted road from the farmhouse, past a large field of young green corn, to the mailbox to collect the morning mail. She reads a letter sent by a soldier overseas, possibly her son. The sun that warms her back and the smile she wears upon her face suggest that the contents of the letter comfort her heart and ease her feelings of remoteness and separation.

In the decades immediately following Chapin's portrait of Ella Marvin, genre scenes of American farm women became a bit more numerous, their domestic duties featured on the covers of popular magazines like The Saturday Evening Post and Country Gentleman. Some cover artists like Steven Dohanos reinterpreted familiar images of the farmer's wife, as in *The Dinner Bell* (October 21, 1944) and *Chicks in the Incubator* (March 5, 1949) [figs. 2.17 & 2.18], both of which reprise motifs explored by Homer in the 1870s. But in works like *Frozen Laundry* (March 5, 1952), which depicts a farm wife collecting ice-covered clothing from a clothesline in the dead of winter, Dohanos increased our understanding of women's work on the farm by depicting an uncommon subject that represented a harsh reality of life on the farm [fig. 2.19].

Although Chapin's formal portrait of Ella Marvin lacks the narrative components of Falter's and Dohanos' storytelling pictures, Chapin surely intended to say something in his painting of Ella Marvin. In this canvas, as well as in his group portrait of the Marvin siblings, Chapin intentionally placed Ella within the proximity of the kitchen stove, implying perhaps that she was never far from it. She could have been a prisoner in her own home much like Frost's lonesome and overworked farmer's wife in "A Servant to Servants." It is indeed possible that Ella reminded Chapin of Frost's friendless heroine; he may have felt a certain empathy toward her and wished to memorialize on a painted canvas her important though undervalued position in the day to day operations of the Marvin homestead. Although her dress is plain and her features hardened, Ella Marvin radiates a sense of stability and personal strength characteristic of many farm women, and I suspect that was Chapin's primary objective.

Chapter Three

A Modern-Day Yeoman:

James Chapin's *Emmet Marvin, Farmer*

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people....

-Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1787¹²⁷

Once he had settled into his modest though agreeable lodgings on the farm, James Chapin set out to draw, sketch, and paint the Marvin family and their common yet noble way of life. Among the first of these works was a bold and impressive portrait titled *Emmet Marvin, Farmer*, painted in 1925 [fig. 3.1]. Sensing that he had produced something original and important, Chapin exhibited the portrait at the New Gallery in New York City the following year. To his pleasant surprise it was purchased by the astute collector of modern art, Duncan Phillips, thereby becoming the first painting of the Marvin series to be acquired by a museum. Phillips, reportedly very pleased with his acquisition, described the painting to an associate as “a human document.”¹²⁸ In an essay he penned approximately two years later Phillips wrote that the painting was “a serious tribute to a sterling American type.”¹²⁹ Phillips’ assessment of Chapin’s *Emmet Marvin, Farmer* is both accurate and insightful. Outfitted in

¹²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. ed. William Peden. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954): 164-65.

¹²⁸ Duncan Phillips cited in Erika D. Passantino, *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 464 and n. 10, pg. 778.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

a blue denim work shirt and baggy tan canvas pants held up by worn suspenders, and seated in a plain wooden chair with a grouping of carefully selected still-life objects strategically placed around him—a ceramic pitcher, a coal oil lamp, and the handle of an axe to his left—Emmet Marvin does indeed represent an authentic American type. He is a genuine, modern-day yeoman, the American farmer of myth and legend who in earlier times represented an ideal, the independent and industrious man of the soil extolled by Thomas Jefferson and others as the bedrock of the nation’s economy and prosperity.

In the late seventeenth century American colonists began to sort themselves out into distinct social groups. The majority of settlers were yeomen, a word of English origin used to describe independent farmers who worked their own land.¹³⁰ They concentrated in the backcountry and there formed small, tight-knit communities. Although their daily labors were devoted to farming, which often involved the clearing of land for raising crops and feeding livestock, yeomen also participated in affairs of the church and village. Ownership and possession of land provided these agrarian families a sense of autonomy and independence from external authorities, but during the seventeenth century this independence was balanced by an equally strong feeling of local identity.¹³¹

Concomitantly, intellectuals in Europe and America were reassessing the place of agriculture in society. During the eighteenth century the concept of farming, and the farmer, took on a new, elevated status in the minds of the day, as exemplified by Thomas Jefferson’s declaration that the yeoman and his kin are God’s chosen peo-

¹³⁰ Robert A. Divine et al. *America: Past and Present*. Second Edition (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1987): 67.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

ple. This notion of the noble cultivator became a key part of the foundation of the new democracy that was the United States of America, and thus the yeoman very early on became a major figure in politics. The Federalist and Agrarian forces in the government were divided in opinion following the Revolution of 1776. The Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, favored a strong central government with most power in the hands the landed few, and advocated commercial and industrial expansion. The Republicans, guided by Jefferson, believed in the primacy of local government and a mainly agrarian national economy, based on small independent farmers. As a result the yeoman and his blessed way of life became an ideal, a symbol of the Agrarian philosophy promoted by Jefferson and later embraced by writers like Horace Greeley. Although he personally found rural life disagreeable, having been raised on a hardscrabble farm in New Hampshire, Greeley wrote in “The Farmer’s Calling” that above all vocations, he would recommend farming to his sons. “A thoroughly good farmer is a useful valuable citizen,” Greeley wrote, “so is a good merchant, doctor, or lawyer....Still, if one of my three sons had been spared to attain manhood, I should have advised him to try and make himself a good farmer, and this without any romantic or poetic notions of agriculture as a pursuit.”¹³² As Greeley goes on to describe in vivid detail, the farmer’s life is one of excessive labor and anxiety. However, he justified his high regard for farming as a vocation by stating “I

¹³² Horace Greeley, “The Farmer’s Calling.” Reprinted in “Characteristic Utterances of Horace Greeley: Letters, Editorials, Essays, and Speeches.” Published in: Proceedings at the Unveiling of a Memorial to Horace Greeley at Chappaqua, New York, February 3, 1914. (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1915): 206-7.

never heard of a temperate, industrious, intelligent, frugal, and energetic farmer who failed to make a living.”¹³³

The antithesis of city dwellers, farmers were often derided by their urban counterparts, whose hidebound opinions and anecdotes regarding rural life were popularized in the press. As Elizabeth Johns has explained, farmers were often characterized as “remote from the up-to-date news of the city, stubborn in their routine, and fashionless in their practicality.”¹³⁴ Yet, despite the many taxing moments that were visited upon the country in its first half century of existence, the yeoman was constantly invoked as the standard of ideal citizenship, as seen in Junius Brutus Stearns’s painting, *George Washington as a Farmer at Mount Vernon* (1851), one of five paintings in a series devoted to phases of Washington’s life [fig.3.2].¹³⁵ Although the former president is the central character in this pictorial narrative, he does not occupy a central position. Instead, Washington, the landowner, the farmer, stands at the far right of the composition talking with his overseer. As Charles Eldredge has observed, Stearns’s Washington is a man of action; “he is humanized; he is the ‘First Farmer’ in an agrarian nation, engaged in the seasonal rites of the harvest.”¹³⁶ Unlike the many heroic portrayals of Washington as a military commander or statesman that were utilized to symbolize the power of the nation, Stearns’s painting depicts Washington as a noble planter, and though the former commander-in-chief refrains from the actual labors involved with farming, he personifies the yeoman ideal.

¹³³ Greeley, 207.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991): 13-14.

¹³⁵ Charles Eldredge, *Tales from the Easel: American Narrative Paintings from Southeastern Museums circa 1800-1950*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004): 8-9. As the author explains, the series is in essence “a biography in paint, a worthy lesson for the nation to emulate.”

¹³⁶ Eldredge, 9.

The general public would continue to refer to the nation as a “farm” and its citizens as “farmers” for decades after the Civil War.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the yeoman ideal persisted as a widespread symbol of the American farm industry as illustrated in a chromolithograph titled *Gift for the Grangers* (1873), a promotional poster for The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry published by J. Hale Powers & Co. Fraternity & Fine Art Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio [Fig. 3.3]. The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, known more familiarly as the Grange, was a farmers’ cooperative organization founded in 1867 by Oliver H. Kelley, a clerk in the Department of Agriculture, to counteract the dreariness of rural life he had witnessed during a tour of the South in the late 1860s.¹³⁸ The organization grew rapidly during the economic depression of the 1870s and by the middle of the decade it had amassed over 800,000 members in 20,000 Granges, most of which were located in the Midwest and the South.¹³⁹ Grange Halls, as the association’s meeting places were commonly known, became the social hubs for many of the farm communities scattered throughout the United States and they provided members with social, cultural, and educational opportunities. They also set up cooperative banks, stores, insurance companies, warehouses, grain elevators, processing plants, and farm machinery factories. Although its constitution banned involvement in politics, the Grange was very political at times, attempting to organize the farmers against the railroads, banks, and merchants who they felt were exploiting them. Many of the local Grange organizations failed due to mismanagement and low finances. Discontent grew among the membership and the

¹³⁷ Johns, 14.

¹³⁸ Divine, 536-37.

¹³⁹ Ibid. While most Granges were located in the South and the Midwest, they could be found in every state of the nation.

movement eventually faded into the turbulent Populist political movement of the 1890s.

The promotional poster *Gift for the Grangers* celebrates not only the Grange organization but also the honorable traits of its members. Located under the banner and silhouetted against divine rays of golden light stand three beauties, symbols of the harvest, clad in classical attire. They preside over a compartmentalized tableau that is divided into vignettes, some of which depict the industrious yeoman performing his daily tasks and enjoying moments of well-deserved leisure. The yeoman stands proudly in the center panel. A blood relative of the iconic Uncle Sam, he wears a white shirt, its sleeves rolled up past the elbows to expose his red undergarments, black-striped red pants, a blue cap on his head, and a red bandana tied around his neck. The heel of his left boot rests on the shoulder of the spade he holds, the tip of its blade planted into the dark rich soil he has turned. The once virgin landscape that stretches out into the distance behind him has been tamed and divided up into parcels that have been fenced and cross-fenced for the raising of crops and livestock. The farmer's industry calls him to till the soil from which he receives God's special blessings, as implied by the presence of the church on the distant hill in the background. The yeoman's importance to the nation and its economy is conveyed in the red banderol below his feet, which reads "I pay for all."

Emmet Marvin's kinship with the yeoman was readily apparent to many of the critics who encountered Chapin's portrait. An unnamed journalist for The Literary Digest wrote, "In the backwoods of New Jersey Chapin found a community where there was still a native-born American element on the farms. Among the canvases that

came back from this holiday, if one may call it that, was a portrait of a farmer, Emmet Marvin.”¹⁴⁰ The writer’s comment suggests that pioneer farm families like the Marvins were disappearing, supplanted by the relentless waves of immigrants that had been arriving on American shores for more than a century before. Many of the new émigrés had come from countries where their ancestors had been peasants, tenant farmers, or serfs, who owed their livelihood to a feudal lord. The lure of land ownership, the promise of building their homes and their lives on land they owned, held a special attraction for many of them. Yet during this same period the number of farm families in the United States had fallen significantly. In 1789 roughly nine out of ten Americans were farmers. Approximately one hundred years later, the period ranging from 1890-1910, farmers made up about one-third of the nation’s total population.¹⁴¹ Their numbers would continue to fall steadily in the decades ahead due in part to the economic catastrophe wrought by the Great Depression and the introduction of industrialized farming.

Another critic writing for The Christian Science Monitor remarked that Chapin’s portrait of a “Jersey farmer” was “composed with such insight, such dignity and sincerity, that its popularity is easily understood and deserved.”¹⁴² As the author further acknowledged, “The construction is sound: the clothes, the blue shirt and brown trousers, have solid consistency and cover living flesh and blood; the ruddy face and hands are firm and strong; the eyes are as honestly painted as they are honest in fact; and every last accessory, including the lamp and axe-handle, are perfect in substance

¹⁴⁰ Anonymous, “A Painter of Labor.” The Literary Digest. (May 8, 1926): 26.

¹⁴¹ Wheeler McMillen, Land of Plenty: The American Farm Story. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961): 11, 105. This decline in the nation’s farm families would continue unabated as revealed in the 1960 United States census, in which little more than one-twelfth—8.7 percent—of the population were farmers.

¹⁴² Anonymous, “James Chapin, American Painter.” The Christian Science Monitor, May 29, 1926.

and true in relationship.”¹⁴³ The always perceptive and poetic C. J. Bulliet, Chapin’s most enthusiastic promoter, offered perhaps one of the best descriptions of the portrait when he wrote,

Emmett Marvin [sic] is no pastoral symphony—he is no Corydon, no Endymion. He comes in from the field and sits down to dinner without changing his sweaty shirt. He wears broad suspenders—not the silken-netted things the Prince of Wales made famous—but wide woven straps that once had strong rubber in them—rubber, however, that in spite of its strength could not withstand the onslaught of perspiration. Time and time again has Emmett hoisted the dingy brass clasp higher and higher to his shoulders as the rubber got weaker and weaker. Chapin happened to catch him at the moment when all of his suspender buttons were sewn on his trousers but Emmett’s face shines with an intelligence that would be fully capable of utilizing an eight-penny nail if a button should fall off. The young farmer knows the smell of coal oil-lamp sitting on a rude wooden shelf is utilized as a bit of still life atmosphere in the portrait.¹⁴⁴

Although Bulliet was able to discern the character of the sitter with a good degree of accuracy, he overlooked the importance of the still-life elements Chapin utilized in his portrait of Emmet Marvin. The inclusion of the coal oil-lamp on the rough wooden shelf was surely not intended to simply enhance the atmosphere of the painting. Its presence indicates that Marvin homestead, like many others throughout the United States, was still without such modern conveniences as electricity. One suspects that they had no indoor plumbing as well. The axe handle that can be seen to Emmet’s left has significance too. As Robert Hughes has explained the man with the axe was a familiar motif in American painting throughout the nineteenth century, his presence symbolic of such concepts as progress and expansion. The man wielding an axe makes an early appearance in Charles Willson Peale’s *The Exhumation of the*

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Bulliet, “Our American Cézanne Looks at Nature: Chapin Smashing His Way to the Top”: 12.

Mastodon (1806) and as Hughes describes him, “he is a foot-soldier in the campaign of knowledge.”¹⁴⁵ Several decades later Thomas Cole depicted the man with an axe in *River in the Catskills* (1843) looking back on the forest he had cleared for farmland.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in George Inness’s *The Lackawanna Valley* (c. 1855) a young boy wearing a red vest and reclining in the sun on the bare ground, directs the viewer’s gaze down a gently sloping hill littered with tree stumps that take on the appearance of gravestones; the forest having been cleared for the moving train, a roundhouse, and the town of Scranton, Pennsylvania, all of which lay in the distance. The man with an axe as an active agent in the progress and expansion of the nation also appears in Frances Palmer’s lithograph *Across the Continent: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”* (1868), published by Currier & Ives. Yet here, two men are shown brandishing axes, both of them busily chopping down trees for the lumber that will be used to enlarge the settlement springing up near the train tracks. The inclusion of the axe in Chapin’s portrait of Emmet Marvin was surely intended to convey the idea that the sitter made regular use of it, perhaps to split wood for the family’s wood-burning cook-stove or even decapitate a chicken for the family’s Sunday supper. However, it is also possible that Chapin placed the axe in this portrait in order to convey Emmet’s kinship with the generations of men who had preceded him, men who had swung their axes to clear away the forests and bring forth farmland capable of raising crops and livestock.

¹⁴⁵ Hughes, 102.

¹⁴⁶ See Allan Wallach, “Thomas Cole’s ‘River in the Catskills’ as Antipastoral.” *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 84 no.2 (June, 2002):334-50. In this essay Wallach offers a critical examination of Cole’s painting and the many interpretations it has prompted.

As the foregoing comments by the critics suggests, Chapin was effective in conveying aspects of Emmet Marvin's character, such as his industry and resourcefulness. In a 1941 interview Chapin sketched out his approach to portraiture, and he began the discussion by insisting that above all, a portrait should be a picture. "In addition to the portrayal of character," he stated, "the canvas should be endowed with all of the qualities that make any picture a work of art, as in the portraits of Velasquez, Rembrandt, and Giorgione."¹⁴⁷ Chapin also sought to convey an informal relationship between the artist and his subject; as he explained, "I prefer the searched portrait, which affords the chance and time to become acquainted with the sitter and time—besides that needed for actual painting—to watch for and jot down in sketches and in memory those fleeting and revealing expressions, material for a final synthesis of characterization that can be poignant and informed with life."¹⁴⁸

Much like Thomas Eakins' paintings a generation or so before, Chapin's portraits were generally done at the artist's own initiative, and they disclose that he too was most comfortable painting the people he knew best. "When Eakins represented individuals," as William Innes Homer has observed, "he portrayed them and their accomplishments as self-made." According to the author, "Eakins had immense faith in humanity, which he tried to articulate in pigment on canvas. He sought to recreate the essence of the person in a new form, but without adding any kind of editorial comment or institutional symbols of authority and power....The unpretentious directness of his portraits is closely linked to their expressive content—communicating, in effect, that nothing has been added and that the individual exists in his or her own right,

¹⁴⁷ James Chapin quoted in "An Evening in the Studio of James Chapin." *American Artist*. (May, 1941): 27.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

free from dependence on external authority, system, or code of behavior.”¹⁴⁹ Homer’s remarks about Eakins could be used to describe Chapin and his painting *Emmet Marvin, Farmer*, as well the other portraits that make up the series.

Chapin clearly admired the Marvin siblings and their humble, self-sufficient way of life as the paintings themselves bear out. He called attention to the Marvins’ familial bond as evinced in their bright blue eyes, their similar clothing, and their large oversized hands, which Chapin intentionally exaggerated in order to underscore their relationship with the land and the labor of farming. In 1929, the same year Chapin vacated the Marvin farm, his regionalist colleague in Kansas, John Steuart Curry, composed a small oil painting titled *My Father’s Hands* [fig. 3.4], which served as a preliminary sketch for the double portrait, *Father and Mother* (1929). Curry’s biographer Lawrence Schmeckebier offered an insightful interpretation of the sketch when he wrote “The heavy bronzed forms bespeak more eloquently the character of one who lives by the work of his hands than does perhaps the total figure itself.”¹⁵⁰ He added, “...the fascination and expressive character of these bronzed, weather-beaten hands of a working farmer are in themselves a fitting tribute to the dignity of rural labor.”¹⁵¹ Surely, Chapin intended the hands of Ella, George, and Emmet Marvin to convey a similar meaning. Curry, who was raised on a farm, firmly believed that the farmer was not a peasant, and as Schmeckebier elaborated, “As a proud individual the American farmer claims the right to own his farm unmortgaged, pay his taxes, raise and market the vital crops, educate his children, and above all to live and act as a free

¹⁴⁹ Homer, 223-24.

¹⁵⁰ Lawrence E. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry’s Pageant of America*. (New York: American Artists Group, 1943): 173.

¹⁵¹ Schmeckebier, 166.

and independent citizen.”¹⁵² The author’s words testify to the persistence of the yeoman ideal well into the twentieth century, as does Chapin’s *Emmet Marvin Farmer*. However, paintings from the bleakest years of the Great Depression like Marie Atkinson Hull’s *Sharecroppers* (1938) call into question the presence of the yeoman ideal. Unlike the land owning Emmet Marvin the men in Atkinson’s double portrait were two impoverished Mississippi tenant farmers [fig. 3.5]. Although they may be destitute sharecroppers, the exact opposite of the yeoman who works his own land, their coarse, misshapen, oversized hands mark them as men of the soil. Despite their insolvency and homelessness, Atkinson has represented these humble sharecroppers with the same sense of dignity Chapin bestowed upon his self-sufficient American farmer.

Chapin’s formal portrait of an American yeoman is something of an anomaly in the history of American art, for this type of individual is most often represented in genre paintings, either at work, at rest, or enjoying quiet moments in the company of his family. Among the earliest depictions of the American farmer are those created by William Sydney Mount, whose early canvases featured a distinct breed of the yeomen, the Yankee farmer. As Elizabeth Johns has explained, the yeoman was representative of a national type but the Yankee came to signify a specifically regional type of farmer, the rural New Englander, who was either admired or scorned. According to Johns, “Outsiders defined them as overly self-confident in their virtue, calculating in their nature, and suspicious of all things new, be it politics, people, ideas or gadgets.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Johns, 15.

In the mid-1830s Mount painted a number of canvases that perpetuated stereotypes of the Yankee farmer, as in *Bargaining for a Horse* [fig. 3.6]. In essence, Mount's commissioned work is witty critique of contemporary American society that parodies the yeoman ideal. Two farmers, one wearing a straw hat and red vest, the other a gold vest and stove pipe hat, are seen in the midst of negotiations concerning the sale of the saddled horse nearby, its thoroughbred-like form silhouetted against the wood fence.¹⁵⁴ Caught up in a daily life of buying and trading, and in his desire to make the best deal he can, the once productive farmer, believed to be the one wearing the straw hat, has neglected his primary responsibilities as seen in the idle tools, the empty shed, the lack of livestock, and the farm's general state of disrepair. As Mount indicates in this picture, the ideal of the industrious and virtuous yeoman who plows, plants, and harvests his own land has fallen prey to the scheming sport of buying and selling.¹⁵⁵

The hardships inflicted on the American farmer during the Civil War may be at the center of Francis William Edmonds' *Hard Times*, which was painted in 1861, the year hostilities between the states erupted [fig. 3.7]. Edmonds' interior genre scene, reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch moralizing pictures, was originally titled *Out of Work and Nothing to Do*. The canvas depicts an idle well-dressed Yankee farmer sitting in what appears to be the main room of the house, which, coincidentally, is as sparsely furnished as the Marvin home. Bored and perhaps a bit vexed about his present lot in life, he sits quietly twiddling his thumbs. Farming implements,

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Johns has suggested that the man wearing the stove pipe hat may from the city, the urban counterpart to the Yankee farmer. However, his dress is consistent with other images of the farmer, as in Francis William Edmond's *Hard Times*, 1861, discussed below.

¹⁵⁵ Johns, 28-32. Johns also notes that in Mount's time the often deceptive practice of horse trading was equated with electioneering and the dubious promises candidates habitually make when campaigning for public office.

a shovel and a hoe, lean against the wall to his right, and act as references to his occupation. Posted on the wall to the right of the hoe is an advertisement for a plow, which, as his surroundings testify, he cannot afford. The focus here is on the farmer's hardship as conveyed in his idleness, his somber demeanor, his apparent poverty, and the crumpled newspaper lying at his feet, which likely offers the farmer little hope that his present circumstances will change. As Shirley Reece-Hughes has observed, Edmonds conveys the farmer's troubles without overly sentimentalizing the scene; his disheartened expression suggests melancholy but not complete despair.¹⁵⁶ While he may be down at the moment, Edmonds' embattled farmer will surely survive his present hardship and prosper, which is a defining characteristic of this American breed.

Despite Mount's parody and Edmonds' bleak portrayal of rural life, the yeoman as an ideal national type persisted as seen in a number of paintings simply titled *American Farmer*. Among the earliest of these renderings is a small canvas by Eastman Johnson from c. 1870 [fig. 3.8], which depicts a farmer whetting his scythe, a time-honored symbol of agrarian life and a popular theme in American art. As in some of Johnson's other renderings of rural life, the hardy well-built farmer wears a costume composed of a white collarless shirt and tan trousers, his rugged monumental form occupying most of the space in this diminutive painting. Johnson's intentions regarding this particular canvas are unknown. While the composition is rather simple, the painting is definitely not a sketch, but instead a finished picture.¹⁵⁷ It is interesting and significant that Johnson, a skilled portraitist, generalized the farmer's face rather

¹⁵⁶ Shirley Reece-Hughes, "Francis William Edmonds." *The Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art: A History and Guide to the Collection*. (St. Joseph, MO: Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, 2002): 51.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Baxter, "Eastman Johnson." *Maine in America: American Art at the Farnsworth Museum*. (Farnsworth, Maine: Farnsworth Museum, 1999): 15.

than create a specific likeness. Also, the artist provided no details that might identify the location, aside from the hills in the background. The landscape the farmer inhabits is as generic as he is. Therefore, Johnson's farmer can be seen as the incarnation of the noble yeoman farmer. As Jean Baxter has written of this work, "Sculpted by summer sunlight, the form of man and scythe projects an icon of Americanism. Small, but monumental in effect, the painting seems elegiac, an image of time past but embodying an idea that continued to have powerful ties to many Americans."¹⁵⁸

Thomas Waterman Wood, Johnson's contemporary from the state of Vermont, achieved a significant measure of fame for his light-hearted genre paintings, which extol the virtues of small-town life he experienced as a youth growing up in New England. In Wood's nostalgic rendering of this iconic type, also titled *American Farmer* (1874) [fig. 3.9], the healthy robust mower portrayed by Johnson has grown old. He has settled into his age as the full gray beard confirms. Furthermore, this American farmer is a doting grandfather sharing the picture with his sweet adoring granddaughter. Dressed similarly to Edmond's out-of-work farmer, minus the overcoat, Wood's farmer sits in the barn on what appears to be a large pumpkin braiding ears of feed corn into a rope. Although this farmer has aged, he has not retired. He continues to work his land, performing a variety of routine tasks, such as growing corn and raising chickens. Furthermore, he is schooling his granddaughter in the simple joys and virtues of farm life. While Wood's painting is a decidedly sentimental view of rural America, a nostalgic rendering of farm life possibly inspired by his experiences as a young boy, his *American Farmer* testifies to the persistence of the yeoman ideal.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

John George Brown, an important figure in the New York art scene in the late 1800s, became known for his genre paintings that portray aspects of rural and city life; he is probably best remembered today for his paintings of fresh-faced children at work or at play. Although significantly larger in its size, Brown's *American Farmer* from 1908 [fig. 3.10], bears a striking resemblance to Johnson's yeoman, so much so that he could be mistaken for his son. Occupying most of the composition from top to bottom, Brown's farmer appears younger and decidedly more monumental. His sturdy physique conveys the vigor and strength of a man in his early twenties. Brown's rugged yeoman, his back to the hot sun, looks as though he might be experiencing one of those moments of quiet reverie, taking stock of where he is and, more importantly, who he is. As in Johnson's canvas, the farmer and the landscape he inhabits have been generalized to such an extent that the painting cannot be a likeness or a portrait of a specific man or place. Rather Brown's picture, much like Johnson's, is an iconic portrayal of the American farmer that pays tribute to the yeoman archetype.

Arnold Blanch, who was raised in a small town in Minnesota surrounded by rich farm land, was one of Chapin's few friends in the art world. Having achieved a measure of success by the early 1940s, he purchased a retired farm in a small fertile valley near Woodstock, New York, where he grew "apples, strawberries, sweet corn, and other garden things."¹⁵⁹ He converted a portion of the barn to a studio and workshop, much as Chapin had done on his farm a few years earlier. In 1934 Blanch painted a picture of an American farmer, but here he inhabits a parched barren land-

¹⁵⁹ Arnold Blanch, Arnold Blanch. (New York: American Artists Group, Inc., 1944). As mentioned in chapter one Chapin bought a small retired farm in New Jersey in 1935 in order to raise fresh vegetables for his young sons while he continued to paint.

scape [fig. 3.11]. His work clothes, which consist of a white sleeveless t-shirt and blue bib overalls, and the wide open landscape, suggest a Midwest location. In contrast to the idealized and serene images of the yeoman examined thus far, Blanch's tall and wiry farmer is clearly distressed. He has taken the straw hat from his head and set it on the dry ground beside him. On bended knee he looks heavenward and, as his dramatic gestures indicate, he is imploring God to send some much-needed rain so that the desiccated landscape he inhabits may be productive again.

Chapin too created a painting of the American farmer in a state of despair, as seen in a canvas from 1929 titled *Drunken Farmer* [fig. 3.12]. This painting is a decidedly unflattering portrait of Emmet Marvin in a drunken stupor. He sits in the same chair he occupied in the family portrait and wears the same costume of blue working shirt and tan canvas trousers held up by suspenders. The subject occupies the corner of an unspecified room that takes on the appearance of a cell. Emmet leans precariously forward, threatening to fall out of his chair. His right arm, which terminates in one of those large oversized Marvin hands, hangs between his legs. In his left hand he clutches a ceramic cup. At his feet sits a brown ceramic jug that surely contains moonshine. Emmet Marvin is almost unrecognizable. He appears disheveled and aged. His face is drawn; his brow is wrinkled. The area around his eyes is swollen from excessive drinking. He stares out into space oblivious to everything and everyone around him. Chapin's palette is dark and a bit somber, the colors conveying the ugliness of the subject. Also, the viewer looks down on the subject from a judgmental vantage point, suggesting that the artist was expressing his disapproval of Emmet Marvin's behavior.

In a letter to his son Elliot, written decades after he left the Marvin farm, Chapin noted that Emmet “was in some ways a thoughtful man with a touch of the poet in his speech. In other ways he was a frustrated and dangerous one, especially when drunk on homemade whiskey.”¹⁶⁰ Late in life Chapin claimed that he helped the Marvin brothers construct a still shortly after he arrived on the farm so that they could manufacture their own whiskey. As the artist’s grandson Tom Chapin confided in an interview, the Marvin brothers often drank to excess, and during these episodes they would gang up on their older sister Ella, which Chapin greatly disliked. On one particular occasion, both Emmet and George threatened Ella with physical violence, and Chapin, who had grown tired of their drunken tirades, destroyed the still. He then went and packed up his belongings and fled the Marvin farm before the inebriated Emmet and George could discover his deed.¹⁶¹ Chapin’s five-year residence on the farm came to an abrupt and unpleasant end. He never returned.

Chapin’s *Drunken Farmer* was reproduced in the popular press. One writer for The Art Digest described the painting as a “variation of the American scene,” a work that is “sensational in its realism.”¹⁶² As the critic correctly noted it was a “story-telling picture” and he argued it could be used as “a campaign document by the Republican party, the Democratic party, or whatever party stands up for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment or nullification of that troublesome section of the Constitution.”¹⁶³ The author described the sitter as having once been a hardworking but happy New Jersey farmer, “the epitome of rural virtue.” However, as he clarified, “the spirit

¹⁶⁰ Chapin quoted in The Eye of Duncan Phillips: 446.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Tom Chapin, January, 2005.

¹⁶² Anonymous, The Art Digest. (January 1, 1932): 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

of rebellion was lurking in his breast and when he found that the price of contraband liquor was prohibitive to a farmer in these days of depressed prices he built himself a still. He manufactured whiskey that was 120 proof—that is which contained 60 percent alcohol—and he drank it as it dripped from the condenser. In his thirst for ethyl alcohol he did not wait to eliminate the three or four other alcohols, some of which are deadly to both body and soul. It was the old, old story. The painter lost one model but gained another.”¹⁶⁴

The two portraits of Emmet Marvin painted by Chapin represent two sides of the same coin, so to speak: the morally upright yeoman and his polar opposite. *Emmet Marvin, Farmer*, painted shortly after Chapin arrived on the farm, clearly conveys the artist’s admiration for his subject and a belief in the industrious and virtuous noble cultivator of yore. In this portrait the viewer confronts the subject as an equal and gazes into the eyes of an intelligent and resourceful New Jersey farmer. During the five years he spent on the Marvin farm Chapin surely witnessed the family’s hardships but it was only at the end of his stay that he committed a canvas to this aspect of their lives with the painting *Drunken Farmer*. While this unbecoming portrait of Emmet Marvin might suggest to some that the ideal of the honorable yeoman had become obsolete, it should be seen as an exception, for the body of work to come out of Chapin’s life with the Marvins indicates otherwise. Moreover, in the years that followed Chapin would return to the theme of the American farmer in his art and once again portray the type of man representative of the yeoman ideal.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Four

The Farmer and His Daughter:

James Chapin's *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith*

She may not in the mazy dance
With jewell'd maidens vie;
She may not smile on courtly swain
With soft bewitching eye;
She cannot boast a form and mien
That lavish wealth has bought her;
But oh! She has much fairer charms,
The farmer's peerless daughter!

-Anonymous¹⁶⁵

George Marvin and His Daughter Edith is a portrait of a New Jersey farmer and his eldest daughter, and it is technically speaking one of James Chapin's finest paintings [fig. 4.1]. In 1928, while still residing on the Marvin farm, he submitted the canvas to an annual exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where it received the prestigious Temple Gold Medal for portraiture, a significant honor. The portrait was exhibited often throughout the 1930s and numerous reproductions of the painting appeared in the popular press.¹⁶⁶ However, for reasons that are not perfectly clear, *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* failed to attract the attention of the critics despite the exceptional qualities of the portrait.

¹⁶⁵ Anonymous, "The Farmer's Daughter." *The New England Farmer* (October 1853) reproduced in Norton Juster, *So Sweet to Labor: Rural Women in America 1865-1895*. (New York: Viking Press, 1979): 63.

¹⁶⁶ The painting was acquired by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in April, 1940; it was purchased from Associated American Artists for \$2500.00. That same year Chapin began teaching classes in portraiture at the school.

The painting belongs to the category of group portraiture. As Shearer West explains, “The stylistic and technical issues facing artists that choose to create group portraits are more complex than those depicting single sitters, for the number of possibilities of how to represent the figures is multiplied. This can involve greater experimentation with composition and physical relationships between the figures. In this respect it has an affinity with theatrical performance.”¹⁶⁷ However, formal representations of parents and their children generally adhere to established gender conventions. Although one will encounter exceptions to the rule, most often fathers are represented with their sons and mothers with their daughters in order to convey the continuation of the family line through the portrayal of two—or sometimes three—generations.¹⁶⁸ This custom is illustrated particularly well in Rembrandt’s portrait of the Amsterdam merchant *John Pellicorne and His Son Gaspar*, and its companion *Susanna Van Collen and Her Daughter Eva Susanna* (c. 1634) [figs. 4.2 & 4.3]. In the first portrait, John Pellicorne hands his son a money bag, a symbol of the family fortune. In the second, Pellicorne’s wife Susanna gives her daughter a gold coin, which is for her dowry. The primary intention in these portraits, according to Gary Schwartz, was to show that the parents were passing their fortunes on to their children intact.¹⁶⁹

This convention was carried over into early American portraiture, as exemplified by Ralph Earl’s portrait of *Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge and His Son George Washington Tallmadge*, 1790 [fig. 4.4]. Born in New York and educated at Yale University, Tallmadge served as a lieutenant-colonel in the Revolutionary War. He made

¹⁶⁷ Shearer West, *Portraiture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 105

¹⁶⁸ West, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt: His Life, His Paintings*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985): 161.

his fortune as a land speculator, acquiring land in New York, Connecticut, Vermont, and the Western Reserve. The setting for the portrait is Tallmadge's study and despite the staginess of the composition, the warm relationship shared by this father and his first-born son is apparent in their happy faces, both of which look out of the canvas to acknowledge the viewer. In the companion piece to this painting [fig. 4.5], Mrs. Tallmadge (Mary Floyd) is represented with two of the family's five children, Henry Floyd and Maria Jones, who is seated on her mother's lap. This portrait also follows custom in that mothers could be, and often were, depicted with their male and female children.

While portraits of fathers and their daughters are rare, since they violate the gender conventions of portraiture that sought to represent the perpetuation of the family in a hierarchal manner, they do appear occasionally, as demonstrated by William Hoare's *Christopher Anstey and His Daughter*, 1771, which dispenses with the dynastic conventions that dominated portraits of families [fig. 4.6]. Hoare was a contemporary of Thomas Gainsborough and worked as a portraitist in the city of Bath. In this informal composition he offers the viewer a snapshot of Anstey's private life by depicting a playful moment between father and daughter. Anstey, seated at his desk and in the midst of composing what is likely an essay intended for publication, is interrupted by his spirited daughter who attempts to attract his attention by tugging on the lapel of his coat and teasing him with one of her richly dressed dolls.¹⁷⁰ Like any adoring father, Anstey looks out of the painting with a faint smile in his eyes and upon his face. Hoare's informal portrait depicts the sentimental side of family life in

¹⁷⁰ Christopher Anstey was a well known writer and the author of *The New Bath Guide* (1766), a lampoon of fashionable Bath society.

the late eighteenth century. Pictures like this may reflect, as Shearer West suggests, social changes in the real behavior and relationships of families and their members, as well as the influence of the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and his ideas regarding the importance of childhood.¹⁷¹

Similar to Hoare, Chapin chose to portray a specific family relationship, that of an American farmer and his daughter. Why Chapin chose to portray George and his daughter Edith together is unclear. Born in 1906, Edith was approximately nineteen years old and unmarried. George had two other children that lived in the home, a son Frank, who was born in 1908 and aged seventeen, and another daughter Ethel, who was born in 1912 and approximately fourteen years old. For reasons known only to the artist, he neglected to depict either of them in any of the sketches or paintings that comprise the Marvin series. It is possible that Chapin, who liked to defy the conventions of art, may have chosen the subject of the farmer and his daughter because of its rarity. He may also have been drawn to portray the two because of the tall tales that have grown up around the theme, the origins of which are impossible to trace.¹⁷² Or it may be due to the simple fact that Chapin “had a thing for pretty young girls,” as his grandson Tom Chapin confided to me during an interview.¹⁷³ The way in which Chapin portrayed Edith and her relationship with the viewer bears this out.

¹⁷¹ West, 117.

¹⁷² For instance, this story I heard from an acquaintance: There was a traveling salesman whose car became hopelessly stuck in a snow bank during a recent blizzard in North Dakota. It took him several hours to make it to the nearest farm house, but frozen half to death, he finally reached the front door and knocked on it. A grizzled old farmer answered and the salesman pleaded for a place to spend the night. 'Why sure, young fella, I can give ya a place to bunk,' said the hospitable old man. 'But, I ain't got no daughter for ya to sleep with, like ya always hear about in them there jokes.' 'Oh!' said the salesman. Then thinking a moment or two said, 'Just how far is it to the next house?'

¹⁷³ Personal interview with Tom Chapin, January 15, 2005.

The farmer's daughter, like her mother, was a frequent subject in American literature and the popular press of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Periodicals such as The Farm Journal, The New England Farmer, and The Household regularly published letters written by farmers' daughters. According to one letter, the daughters of most farm families were considered to be less significant beings than the sons, the eventual heirs of the family business.¹⁷⁴ Such newspapers also published many articles regarding the question of whether to marry or to remain single, and if one chose to wed there was advice on how to get and keep a husband. In an essay titled, "The Ideal Farm Girl," published in The Farm Journal, author Mary Sidney described the farmer's daughter as one who is always cheerful and content with rural life. She is devoted to her family; she is hardworking and uncomplaining; and importantly, she does not entertain any ideas of escaping "the (so-called) drudgery of house and home work, and country living."¹⁷⁵ As the author warns,

The farm girl is all right until she gets herself worked into the notion that she is capable of something higher than helping her folks at home—that there is a 'career' for her that will lead to wealth and distinction....When she feels herself pretty well assured that she is of better stuff than her mother, and that she will marry no 'hayseed' for a husband and settle down for life to domestic drudgery as she did, there is trouble brewing for her that will sooner or later overwhelm her."¹⁷⁶

The noblest work a farmer's daughter possibly could undertake was to help elevate the family's home and business, as the author acknowledged.

Visual representations of the farmer's daughter, though scarce at the beginning of the twentieth century, became more abundant in the decades that followed.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from an anonymous farmer's daughter reprinted in Juster, 64-65.

¹⁷⁵ Mary Sidney, "The Ideal Farm Girl." The Farm Journal. (March, 1903), reprinted in Juster, 65.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

During that time they evolve to become overtly sexual as they cater to popular myths and legends regarding the simple farmer and his naïve daughter. Chapin's portrait of George Marvin and his daughter Edith is rather straightforward in its concept and composition. As the artist once stated, he chose to portray these people simply because they had become a part of his daily life and it seemed right that they should be the subject of his art.¹⁷⁷ The setting is an interior space of the Marvin home, the corner of a room. A strong light from the upper left illuminates both figures, bathing all in a clear even light. Edith casts a faint shadow on the wall behind her. A large hat, possibly a field hat, hangs on the wall directly above George. Both figures are seated at a round wood table covered with a red and white checkered tablecloth that Chapin had borrowed from the proprietors of Robbins General Store, which once served as the post office, dry goods store, and primary meeting place for residents living within the immediate vicinity.¹⁷⁸ According to Don Robbins, Chapin came to the store one day complaining that the painting on which he was working required some visual interest, which a tablecloth might provide. He consulted with Robbins' mother and arranged to borrow the red and white tablecloth for the duration of the sitting, after which he returned it.¹⁷⁹ George surely never appeared more handsome than he does in this portrait. He is the hill-country equivalent of the gentleman-farmer. His lean face, with the telling wattle of age about the jaw and neck, is clean shaven except for his signature brown moustache, which is neatly trimmed. He also appears to have had his

¹⁷⁷ James Chapin in an article dated May 4, 1940 and titled "Pennsylvania Academy Buys Chapin Canvas." The article is in the files of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; its source is unknown.

¹⁷⁸ The building, constructed in 1837, was purchased by Alfred Robbins in 1902. At that time it functioned as the post office, but under Robbins, and later his son, Victor, and grandson, Donald, the store became a thriving community center selling everything from potatoes, canned peas, and coffee, to fishing rods, fertilizer, dynamite, plow shares, nails, corsets, and high-button shoes

¹⁷⁹ Personal interview with Don Robbins, January, 10, 2005. The Robbins still have the tablecloth in their possession.

hair recently cut. George wears a brown vest over his familiar uniform of blue denim shirt and tan canvas trousers. He is seated at the right of the composition in an armless Windsor-style chair and leans forward, forearms resting on his lap, his large and intentionally oversized hands gathered together and gently clutching his brown felt hat. George stares out of the painting to the left. His face appears a bit drawn, and he seems somewhat somber and introspective. In his general appearance he reminds one of Rodin's brooding *Thinker*. Directly behind George, propped up in the corner, is his double-barrel shotgun, which we have come to assume he might use to run off any troublesome or unworthy suitor—and more stereotypically any traveling salesman—that may pursue his daughter.

Edith wears a pretty pink dress trimmed at the collar with a simple white ribbon and decorated at the shoulders with small epaulets fastened with pink buttons. The pastel color of her home-spun garment accentuates her femininity and may symbolize her virginity, passions not yet realized. She wears a costume jewelry headband in her short wavy auburn hair and looks like a young princess adorned with a jeweled tiara. Edith looks across the expanse of the table, those clear blue Marvin eyes meeting the viewer's directly. There is a subtle warmth revealed in her gaze and the hint of a smile on her face. Her right arm rests on the table and directs the viewer's eye to the bowl of apples placed near her, the red fruit mirroring the rosy blush of her cheeks. In the directness of her gaze, her posture, and the sense of warmth she radiates, Edith calls to mind John Singleton Copley's portrait of *Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwait* from 1771 [fig. 4.7]. It is possible that Chapin, a professed portrait painter, was familiar with Copley's oeuvre and that he used this portrait as the basis for his portrayal of Edith.

As in Copley's painting the fruit may be symbolic of Edith's fertility, her gardening skills, or as a general symbol of femininity.¹⁸⁰ This little bit of still-life may also refer to the fact that she is a farmer's daughter and as the saying goes, the apple of his eye. However, Edith can be regarded also as a temptress, a modern-day Eve seducing the artist—the male viewer—with her direct and enticing gaze. The bowl of apples can be seen as a reference to the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, which brought about man's fall from grace and led to his sexual awakening. Though he blocks physical access to his daughter, George Marvin looks away; completely unaware of his daughter's seductive charms. Therefore the viewer is able to enjoy without fear of reproach both visual and psychological access to her.

In contrast to Chapin's real-life father and daughter the couple represented in Grant Wood's *American Gothic* are fictional, nameless, and their relationship uncertain [fig. 4.8]. Nevertheless, the contrast that exists between these two paintings provides a context in which to discuss Chapin's portrait. As Wood once explained rather evasively, the man and woman in his picture were intended to represent a type of American, the kind of Midwest folks who might inhabit the carpenter Gothic home behind them that inspired the picture.¹⁸¹ Wood's sister Nan, who posed for the woman in the painting, was the first to clarify the familial relationship of the couple depicted, though it appears nobody took her explanation seriously. In a 1930 interview with the Des Moines Register she stated "I am not supposed to be the gentle-

¹⁸⁰ See Carrie Rebora, Paul Staiti, et al, *John Singleton Copley in America*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1995): 271. Note that Copley's still life is composed of apples, peaches, and pears.

¹⁸¹ Grant Wood cited in Steven Biel, *American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005): 45-46.

man's wife, but his daughter."¹⁸² She added, "I am supposed to be one of those terribly nice and proper girls who get their joy and life out of going to Christian Endeavor and frowning horribly at them young couples in back seats if they giggle or whisper."¹⁸³ However, her brother apparently prized ambiguity over certainty for he never provided an explanation regarding the couple's relationship.

In contrast to Chapin's direct and flattering portrait of a farmer and his young daughter, Wood's painting has been a puzzle ever since its public debut; therefore it has generated much debate. However, most of the criticism hurled at Wood's painting over the years, when examined closely, tends to say more about the critics and their biases than about the work in question. Initially greeted with a significant amount of hostility from the general public, Wood's painting has gone on to become a national icon and one of the most easily recognized paintings in the history of art. Early critics, echoing the public's reaction, claimed that Wood's painting was a satire of the rural Midwest, as evidenced in dour looking couple he had portrayed. Although the artist may have intended to depict a farmer and his spinster daughter, many viewers of the time saw a husband and his wife, much as they do today.¹⁸⁴ But as Biel has pointed out in his careful analysis of the painting, Wood did little to correct misinterpretations of the work during his life so as to offend the least number of people, especially his fellow Iowans, many of whom believed that they had been ridiculed in the painting.¹⁸⁵ On several occasions Wood went so far as to claim that the figures he

¹⁸² Nan Wood cited in Biel, 50.

¹⁸³ Ibid. Nan Wood wrote about the couple again in 1944 two years after her brother's death, reiterating her earlier statement that the couple depicted in *American Gothic* were a father and his spinster daughter. See Biel, 51.

¹⁸⁴ See for example the title sequence to the popular ABC television melodrama *Desperate Housewives*, in which Wood's farmer receives a sucker punch from his annoyed wife for ogling a pin-up of Betty Grable.

¹⁸⁵ Biel, 48.

portrayed were not farmers at all but were instead small-town folks. Interestingly, no one seemed to question the artist's gratuitous clarification despite the presence of a small red barn in the background and the three-tined fork used for pitching hay that Wood's gentleman-farmer grasps in his right hand. As Thomas Hoving writes in his well-researched study of this painting, Wood's sister Nan once stated that when her brother asked her to pose for the painting he explained that his intention was to paint a gentle satire of "straight-laced Bible Belt Gothic types."¹⁸⁶ When she expressed some hesitation in posing for the painting Wood assured her that he would alter her features so that she would be unrecognizable as the model and therefore she would not have to worry about being linked with the work.¹⁸⁷

Disagreements as to the merits and meanings of Wood's painting have raged ever since its appearance, though most commentators have come to see the picture as a satire of the primitive Midwest and its inhabitants. Matthew Baigell, clearly no admirer of either Grant Wood or *American Gothic*, writes that "it was the right painting shown at the right time and in the right place," and that Wood became one of the best known artists of the period "more for what he represented than for his ability as a painter."¹⁸⁸ Baigell, who finds the popularity of Wood's panel difficult to fathom, subscribes to earlier interpretations of the picture, which viewed it as a brutal satire. However, he surely misconstrues the artist's intentions when he describes the couple as "Middle Western descendents of the Puritans so pilloried in the literature of the 1920" that they "exude a generalized, barely repressed animosity that borders on

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Hoving, *American Gothic: The Biography of Grant Wood's American Masterpiece*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2005): 41.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Paintings of the 1930s*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974): 109.

venom.”¹⁸⁹ He goes on to write, “One wonders if the farmer, who holds a pitchfork rather than a rake or hoe, is turning over the soil to sow the Devil’s hate rather than God’s love. The farmer is hardly the mythic yeoman—the new Jesus—of the Middle West, but, more understandably, a symbol of the malevolent spirits that inhabited this region.”¹⁹⁰

Venturing into uncharted territory, Wanda Corn has challenged the general consensus by arguing that the claim made about *American Gothic*, that it is a satirical work of art ridiculing or mocking the complacency and conformity of Midwestern life, is inaccurate. She contends that this is essentially a false interpretation, one that originated with critics in the 1930s and has become conventional wisdom ever since.¹⁹¹ Corn attempts to refute two fundamental opinions regarding this work: first, that European sources are responsible for Wood’s masterpiece and secondly, that it is a satire of the couple represented. While she does show that there are indeed American precedents or sources for Wood’s composition, Corn’s overall argument remains less than satisfactory for several reasons. First, the painting technique of oil glazing that Wood employed in *American Gothic* was influenced to some degree, as most art historians agree, by Northern Renaissance paintings that he encountered during his 1928 sojourn abroad. Secondly, his sister Nan’s comment regarding the original concept for the painting as a gentle satire, from which she never wavered, seems to rebut Corn’s argument that it is not. Additionally, Wood stated on several occasions that he had intentionally distorted the couple’s physical features in order to make the models

¹⁸⁹ Baigell, 110.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Wanda Corn, “The Birth of a National Icon: Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*.” *Reading American Art*. Eds., Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 387-408. See also: Wanda Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 129-42.

unrecognizable to the public as well as have the figures appear more in harmony with the lines of the house behind them, which clearly suggests the possibility of satire, and possibly caricature. Steven Biel has offered perhaps the most satisfying appraisal of this enigmatic work when he writes, “Even if we could know for certain what Wood intended *American Gothic* to be about—and we can’t—the painting’s meanings have much more to do with the viewer’s perceptions than with his intentions.”¹⁹²

Putting aside Wood’s questionable objectives, we can turn to the composition itself, which clearly differs from Chapin’s painting, yet the two works do share some interesting similarities. In contrast to Chapin’s horizontally oriented canvas, Wood utilized a vertical format for his composition. He placed his subjects in a neat but cluttered landscape and although they fully occupy the foreground, they compete with the house and its ornaments, the red barn, the trees, the distant church steeple, and other elements that compose the background. Wood’s farmer is dressed in the outdated attire of an 1890s gentleman–farmer, composed of blue bib overalls, a collarless striped white shirt and simple black jacket. He grasps a pitchfork in his slightly oversized right hand that threatens to break through the picture plane, and like the hands belonging to George Marvin, it bears the traces of his daily labors in its bulk and coarseness. The presence of the pitchfork can be equated with George Marvin’s shotgun, for they surely were intended to convey a similar purpose or function. Unlike the introspective George Marvin whose gaze is directed inward, Wood’s farmer, wearing silver wire-rimmed glasses, stares straight out of the painting with a grim intensity that calls to mind the ominous all-seeing eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, a pair of fad-

¹⁹² Biel, 58. From my research I have come to the conclusion that Wood himself may have lost sight of his original intentions. It is also possible that his intentions were not simple and fixed but complex and multiple.

ing, bespectacled eyes painted on an old advertising billboard that “brood on over the solemn dumping ground” of the valley of ashes, in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925).¹⁹³ If the woman standing along side him is indeed his daughter, we have been warned to keep our distance.

In marked contrast to the young, healthy, and attractive farmer’s daughter Chapin portrayed, Wood’s unidentified farm woman takes on the appearance of a lean and hard-faced spinster. Located on the porch of the house directly over her right shoulder, are pots containing a sansevieria, begonias, and geraniums, which symbolize her connection to the domestic realm as does the bowl of apples in Chapin’s rendering of Edith. Yet, unlike George Marvin’s eldest daughter who acknowledges the viewer’s presence, the woman in Wood’s canvas diffidently averts her gaze and wears a slight but perceptible scowl upon her face. In fact, she appears to be quite uncomfortable and perhaps, a little annoyed. Moreover, she has been intentionally desexualized, her femininity concealed by the high neckline of her somber black dress, its collar firmly secured with a large cameo, and the flat pattern of her dark brown apron trimmed with white rickrack. In many ways she could be considered the mother of the young woman who appears in another painting by Wood clearly titled *The Farmer’s Daughter* [fig. 4.9]. In this painting, which belongs to the series *The Fruits of Iowa*, commissioned in 1932 as wall decorations for the Hotel Montrose, the farmer’s young fresh-faced daughter holds a bowl of string beans in her right hand

¹⁹³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby. (New York: Scribner, 2004): 24. One of several recurring motifs in Fitzgerald’s novel, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleberg are generally interpreted as God staring down upon and judging American society as a moral wasteland, though the novel never makes this point explicitly. Instead, Fitzgerald suggests throughout the novel that symbols only have meaning because people instill them with meaning. Such is the case with the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleberg, which the character George Wilson comes to believe are in fact the eyes of God instructing him to avenge the death of his Myrtle. See chapters 8 and 9.

and a large head of cabbage in the left; single rows of beets and onions grow at her feet. Like her female counterpart in *American Gothic* she averts her gaze. She too has been desexualized, her body hidden under the flat pattern of the clothing she wears.

Although she is not represented as suggestively, Chapin's representation of Edith Marvin comes closest to anticipating the representations of the farmer's daughter that appear in the following decades. On the cover of its October 6, 1941 edition, Life magazine depicted a farmer's daughter in North Dakota at a push pump well drawing water into an enameled bucket [fig. 4.10]. Silhouetted against a cloudless sky, she looks out of the composition to the right, in the direction of the wind that blows her scarf and hair, and smiles broadly. This is a photograph of the modest, hardworking, and self-sacrificing farmer's daughter, an ideal that was becoming ever more distant as illustrated in Jules Erbit's *Farm Beauties* from the 1950s [fig. 4.11].

Although little is known about Erbit (1889-1968), this Hungarian-born artist and master of the pastel medium was one of the most prolific pin-up artists of the twentieth century, his work spanning from the 1930s to the 1950s. His flawlessly beautiful women embellished calendars, posters and prints that were published by C. Moss, and Brown & Bigelow. Erbit pioneered the glamour approach to the pin-up as represented by *Farm Beauties*, in which the loveliness of the young farm girl, a Hollywood starlet set down in a make believe pasture, and the doe-eyed calf, possibly a young heifer, are equated. It is also possible that Erbit sought to modernize the popular myth of Europa and the Bull for a twentieth-century American audience as the clearly affectionate calf is shown nuzzling the farmer's daughter, who is represented as the archetype of health and glamour. She is dressed in a white polka-dot red dress

with white sleeves and a low cut neckline, and unlike the modestly dressed Edith Marvin, she reveals a bit of cleavage. A wide brimmed straw hat hangs on her back. Her brown eyes sparkle, as does her perfect smile. She wears jewelry—earrings and a bracelet—and a small bouquet of spring flowers in her styled coiffure. Although she is placed in a pasture and flanked by a large red barn and silos to the right and a farmhouse with smoke rising from the chimney to the left, she is clearly no farmer's daughter. Rather, she looks like a pampered city girl or starlet transplanted onto the farm, a young Ava Gardner on holiday.

Erbit's contemporary Walt Otto (1895-1963), another master of the pin-up era, produced numerous cheesecake illustrations of the farmer's daughter for calendars, posters, and prints that could be acquired in various sizes. Otto's farm girls, whether blond or brunette (he apparently favored the later) look much like glamorous movie stars on location, as in *The Farmer's Daughter*, *Fishing*, and *Puppies for Sale*, c. 1950 [figs. 4.12-4.14]. Otto's idealized farm lasses are scantily clad in cut offs or short skirts with tight-fitting shirts that showcase their hourglass figures. In *The Farmer's Daughter* and *Fishing*, Otto's bewitching young women wear wide-brimmed straw hats that form halos around their short brown locks, identifying them as angelic country girls and at the same time, underscoring their sexuality. The farmer's daughter, shod in high heels that accentuate the shapeliness of her legs, stands seductively with a pitchfork in her hand pitching hay. She performs her task with apparent ease and pleasure and directs her radiant face and smile to the male viewer. Her equally adorable pets, a horse and three cocker spaniel puppies, are the beneficiaries of her love and affection, which the viewer can only imagine. In *Fishing*

she has taken a break from her chores and to the viewer's delight, cools her dainty feet in the clear waters of the stream. Tall tales of the innocent yet seductive country girl, her distrustful and protective father, and the wily traveling salesman served as the fodder for numerous soft-porn comic books published by Trojan Comics in the 1950s [figs. 4.15 & 4.16]. Here the subject is the all too familiar tale of the farmer's daughter and the skirt-chasing traveling salesman who, smitten by the country girl's looks and charms, seeks to take advantage of her naiveté.

Hollywood too bears some responsibility in our culture's popular perceptions of the farmer's daughter. Between 1910 and 1962 there were at least nine films produced titled *The Farmer's Daughter*; the 1947 RKO production won Academy Awards for its stars, Loretta Young for Best Actress and Charles Bickford for Best Supporting Actor. When we meet the farmer's daughter, played by Loretta Young, at the beginning of the film she is dressed similarly to the voluptuous young women featured on the cover of Trojan comics, her long wavy auburn locks cascading down her bare shoulders [fig.4.17]. In 1963, a television series based on the film appeared and starred Inger Stevens, Cathleen Nesbitt and William Windom. *The Beverly Hillbillies*, a popular CBS television series about a hill-country family transplanted to Beverly Hills, California, after finding oil on their Missouri Ozarks land, debuted a year before in September, 1962. The show's cast, comprised of Buddy Ebsen as Jed Clampett, Irene Ryan as Daisy "Granny" Moses, Donna Douglas as Ellie May Clampett, and Max Baer, Jr. as Jethro Bodine, was featured on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post February 2, 1963, for which designer Allan Grant appropriated Grant Wood's *American Gothic* [fig. 4.18]. As the stereotypical farmer's daughter, Ellie

May was depicted as a strong capable girl. With shoulder length curly blond hair and a creamy white complexion, she was as stunningly beautiful as she was naïve. She wore men's clothing, a tight fitting shirt and blue jeans with a length of rope knotted at the ends for a belt, and used the bras that were offered her as "double-barrel sling-shots." Her feminine appearance belied her strength, for Ellie May was a powerhouse; she could throw a fastball as well as major league pitcher and wrestle any man to the ground. She tamed wild animals with her nurturing ways and made pets of them, much to the general annoyance of her family. Despite the family's many attempts to find her a suitable mate, she chose to remain single, and was considered by her family to be an old maid at the age of twenty three.

It is possible that Chapin's portrait *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* was inspired by popular tales of the farmer and his daughter, for the compositional details suggest as much. It is equally possible that the painter felt a strong attraction to Edith Marvin, and that he wished to immortalize her in this state. Whatever his motive may have been, Chapin's portrait differs from conventional renderings of a farmer and his daughter in that he intentionally bestowed a sense of dignity upon his subjects, as Wood recognized and described in his essay "James Chapin and the Marvins." There is no hint of satire in Chapin's portrait, as in Wood's *American Gothic*, nor are there any overt references to Edith's sexuality as in the many images of the farmer's daughter created by commercial artists such as Jules Erbit and Walt Otto. Although Chapin's sitters are identified, they are like Wood's anonymous subjects in that they were intended to represent a specific type of American. But Chapin,

unlike his Midwestern colleague, made his admiration for his subjects known, as plainly stated in this portrait of a rural New Jersey farmer and his daughter.

Chapter Five

James Chapin's *Fox Hunter*:

A Portrait of a New Jersey Hilltopper

Little red fox he runs like winking,
Little red fox he runs alone.

- Origins unknown ¹⁹⁴

In recent years animal rights activists in Europe and the United States have been successful in branding foxhunting a cruel and barbaric sport, and though this ancient contest between man and animal has been radically transformed by their efforts, foxhunting endures, its popularity only slightly tarnished.¹⁹⁵ The sport appeared in America during the early colonial period and from its emergence evolved along two distinct lines, the imported hierarchal English style and an indigenous egalitarian variety commonly known as hilltopping. Although both forms employ specially trained hounds in the pursuit of their quarry, these two modes of foxhunting have little else in common. Artistic renderings of this popular pastime have developed along similar lines with American artists favoring the visual pageantry of the English style and its colorful assemblies of scarlet-coated huntsmen and their attendants riding on horseback through blazing autumn landscapes, the cool morning air sweetened by the music of baying bloodthirsty hounds. Seldom found, despite its long popularity, are

¹⁹⁴ Anonymous, cited in J. Blan Van Urk, *The Story of American Foxhunting: From Challenge to Full Cry*. Vol. I (New York: The Derrydale Press, 1940): 10.

¹⁹⁵ Sue Leeman, Associated Press. "Hunters mark new season despite ban on using hounds." *Lawrence Journal-World*, (Sunday, November 6, 2005): A4.

representations of the indigenous independent hilltopper, simple farmer-hunters like George Marvin, who patrolled well-known fox runs on moonlit winter nights accompanied only by his beloved and trustworthy foxhound. James Chapin's portrait of George Marvin titled *Fox Hunter* (1929) is important in the history of American art for it is a sensitive, respectful, and uncommon portrayal of a little-known, and yet authentic, American sportsman, the backcountry hilltopper [fig. 5.1].

George Marvin posed for Chapin's *Fox Hunter* during the winter of 1926, at a time when the English sport of running to the hounds was experiencing a renaissance in the United States, likewise the sport of hilltopping. In the decade immediately following World War I, the imported version of foxhunting witnessed a period of unprecedented growth, its popularity expanding beyond the eastern states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia, where most of the clubs were located, to encompass new regions of the country. During the 1920s, fifty-two new officially recognized associations were established in the United States, bringing the American total to well over one hundred.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, there were hundreds of less formal clubs scattered across the nation, with minor organized hunts found in almost every state of the union. The popularity foxhunting enjoyed during the "roaring twenties" is also evident in the many references to the sport that pervaded popular culture.

The still popular foxtrot, one of the most significant developments in American ballroom dancing, appeared in the spring of 1914; the dance's popularity peaked during the party atmosphere of 1920s.¹⁹⁷ Almost immediately, the foxtrot became

¹⁹⁶ Richard Longrigg, *The History of Foxhunting*. (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. Publisher, 1975): 215.

¹⁹⁷ Christina M. Hawkins, *A compilation and Analysis of the Origins of the Foxtrot in White Mainstream America*. Masters Thesis. Brigham Young University, 2002. While the origin of the foxtrot is debatable, the

identified with the sport of foxhunting. In the years following the foxtrot's appearance there was an explosion of musical compositions written specifically for the dance. Much of the sheet music that appeared linked the foxtrot to the glamorous pastime of foxhunting as exemplified in the cover illustrations for *The Chevy Chase Fox Trot* (1914) by J. Herbert "Eubie" Blake and *The Beverly Hunt* (1915) by M. Kay Jerome [figs. 5.2 & 5.3]. These two examples indicate that both men and women participated in the chase. Additionally, folksongs and tunes, most of unknown origins, such as *The Fox Chase*, *Fox and Hounds*, and the toe-tapping *Fox Hunter's Jig*, were resurrected during the 1920s; some, most notably *Fox Hunter's Jig*, have become standards among bluegrass musicians today. The medieval beast tale of the wily Reynard the Fox, recounted by generations of storytellers, enjoyed new-found popularity as well, with John Masefield's classic poem "Reynard the Fox or The Ghost Heath Run," published by The MacMillan Company in New York (1920), the hands-down favorite among foxhunters everywhere.

While representations of American foxhunts date back to the late eighteenth century as seen in two related paintings by an anonymous artist titled *About to Move Off* and *With Brush in View* [figs. 5.4 & 5.5], they are scarce in American art until the sport attains its greatest popularity in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹⁸

While other outdoor activities such as fishing, bird hunting, and big-game hunts were regularly depicted by American artists, as demonstrated in the works of painter-

vaudeville performer Harry Fox is credited with having first performed it at The New York Theatre in 1914. His animated dance movements, consisting of a slow walk that took two beats of music, followed by a series of short trots, each taking one beat, were christened "Fox's trots." Hawkins believes that the foxtrot originated in black music and dance and was introduced to mainstream white America through performers like Fox.

¹⁹⁸ These two paintings are believed to portray Bartholomew Truehart and his private pack of foxhounds in Powhatan County, Virginia, circa 1780.

sportsmen, representations of foxhunting in the United States are uncommon. The American print firm of Currier & Ives published at least ten different lithographs related to foxhunting, four of these comprising a set that was issued in 1846 [fig. 5.6].¹⁹⁹ However, the events and scenes represented in this group of prints are indistinguishable from British renderings of foxhunts created by notable English artists, such as George Rowlandson (1861-1918) and Heywood Hardy (1843-1933) [figs. 5.7 & 5.8], which illustrate any number of events associated with “the run,” a foxhunting term used to describe the chasing of the fox from the finding to the kill. The prints published by Currier and Ives were popular with people from all walks of life; the representations of fictional foxhunts lent an air of sophistication to private homes, businesses, and even government buildings, much as similar images do today.²⁰⁰

There have been a few American artists, such as Percival Rousseau (1859-1937) and Franklin B. Voss (1880-1953), both avid foxhunters, who devoted some canvases to depictions of the chase. Their much sought after paintings and prints of established American foxhunts, such as Voss’s skillfully detailed group portrait *Thanksgiving Day Meet in 1923 of the Meadow Brook Hunt* [fig. 5.9], capture the colorful excitement associated with the running to the hounds in the English manner during the 1920s. Furthermore, due to the lack of images depicting hilltopping such paintings provide a context in which to discuss the significance and singular characteristics of Chapin’s New Jersey hilltopper.

¹⁹⁹ The Currier & Ives catalogue raisonné list these four prints as numbers 2281-84; they are titled in order of the hunt, *Fox Chase: Throwing Off*, *Fox Chase: Gone Away*, *Fox Chase: In Full Cry*, and finally *Fox Chase: The Death*. *Currier and Ives: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Vol. 1. (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1984): 214, 232-33.

²⁰⁰ Currier & Ives, 232-33. On a recent visit to Bolivar, Missouri I had cause to visit the city council chamber that was decorated with contemporary-framed prints of foxhunts. This is just one example of many I can cite attesting to the popularity of pictures depicting foxhunts in the English manner, which continues to the present day.

In Chapin's painting sunlight enters the room from a nearby window and illuminates the figure of a middle-aged man dressed in outdoor attire, a mail-order Carhartt canvas coat and pants. The chamois-colored jacket, masterfully rendered in Chapin's broken brushstroke, is buttoned tightly to the collar in a dignified manner like the blue denim work-shirt beneath it. The coat appears well-worn, the pinched collar discolored by perspiration and the sleeves soiled from many years of use. It features two large roomy pockets, which are ideal for carrying such items as buckshot and tobacco. The hunter's head is crowned by a brown felt hat, which he was seldom seen without, its shallow brim curled slightly on the right side to expose the shape and folds of his ear. Alert blue eyes, like those of an owl who has just spotted a vole scurrying about in the grass, peer out from under the tattered brim of the hat. However, the subject's gaze does not meet the viewer's. Rather it appears to be fixed on some object nearby. A strong Roman nose leads to a neatly trimmed mustache, which in turn reveals a full lower lip. The hunter's face is lined with wrinkles and his cheeks have started to take on the hollow look that comes with age. His ruddy complexion is the result of working out of doors for many years. The heat from the summer's sun and the cold bitter winds of winter have left their indelible marks upon his weather-beaten face.

Turned slightly to his left, the sportsman assumes a comfortable and dignified pose, his arms crossed casually over his chest, the left arm and hand resting on the right. In his left hand he grips a pipe, its corncob-like bowl and stem held gently but firmly between the thumb and index finger. The pipe denotes leisure, of the kind afforded a gentleman, for the ritual act of filling and smoking a bowl of tobacco obliges

the pipe-smoker to devote some time to relaxation. The palm of his right hand forms a cap covering a single-barrel shotgun, its stock apparently resting on the floor. The gun functions as a phallic signifier, symbolizing the subject's virility and ruggedness. A shotgun is the hunter's preferred shooting iron for bringing down small fast moving game, such as pheasants, rabbits, and foxes, due to the scattering of the shot over a wide range. Moreover, the single-barrel shotgun indicates that the subject is a skilled marksman, for the hunter must reload it after every discharge, which requires time, a wasted shot affording a bird or animal the opportunity for flight. The hands holding the gun and pipe are working hands, large, strong, and suntanned, and although his fingernails are trimmed, evidence of the sportsman's occupation remains in the soil imbedded in his cuticles; he is clearly a common laborer and a hunter, and in the eyes of the artist, a man worthy of respect.

Curiously, Chapin chose to portray his foxhunter within the confines of the Marvin family's home rather than in the landscape, the latter context being traditional in portraits of those who hunt foxes in the English manner; and although the subject is known to have owned a foxhound, the artist elected to exclude it from the portrait. The interior space George Marvin occupies possesses a Shaker-like simplicity and is free of any household objects or furnishings that might momentarily distract the viewer's attention from the subject. The only forms of interior decoration, if they can be called that, are the mottled brownish-gray walls, the dark brown wainscoting, and the rounded ledge of the wooden window frame. George Marvin's role outside the home is alluded to by his placement near the window, an artistic convention dating

back at least to the early Renaissance. He is a farmer who, more out of necessity than sport, must guard his livestock from predators like the fox.

The double-hung window in Chapin's painting looks out onto a small portion of a farmyard, the view restricted by two structures warmed by the sun's light. The larger one, with bare horizontal wood-lap siding, is most likely the barn, due to its large door and the opening in the gable, indicative of a hay loft. The smaller red building, with vertical siding and a mottled green roof, possibly a tool shed, looks structurally unsound; its foundation is no longer square, which has caused the building to lean in an unstable manner. A pile of firewood, which George and his brother Emmet cut and split for the family's cook stove, litters the ground just outside the window. The season is unspecified. Grasses and weeds grow alongside the foundations of both buildings and in the dry soil of the farmyard; however, the pale blue sky has the haziness of a cold autumn day, the midday light filtered by a thin layer of high clouds.

George Marvin represents the Northern type of foxhunter as described in John James Audubon's The Quadrupeds of North America (1854), which was among the first publications in the country to acknowledge the presence of the indigenous hill-topper. In Audubon's text the author makes an important distinction between the type of men who pursue this sport, and he divides them into two distinct regional groups, the Northern and the Southern.²⁰¹ As practiced in the South, with mounted huntsmen riding to the hounds in the cool morning air, foxhunting is "regarded as a healthful manly exercise, as well as an exhilarating sport, which in many instances would be

²⁰¹ John James Audubon, The Quadrupeds of North America. Vol. 1 (New York: V. G. Audubon, 1854): 170.

likely to preserve young men from habits of idleness and dissipation.”²⁰² In the northern portions of the country where the land becomes hilly and rocky, foxhunters may follow the southern manner of the sport. However, Audubon also mentioned the presence of another type of foxhunter, one who prefers to pursue his quarry on foot. Such men may form organized hunts, like their mounted counterparts. However, this class of foxhunter, accompanied by only one or two hounds, prefers to take a “stand” along the ridge tops, hoping to shoot the fox in its run.²⁰³ Although he does not describe them in such terms, Audubon made a distinction between foxhunters who practice the orthodox English version of the sport and the native hilltopper.

While numerous writers have drawn attention to these two disparate forms of foxhunting, Master of Fox Hounds Joseph B. Thomas is more perceptive and accurate in citing three categories of foxhunters in the United States, further sub-dividing the hilltopper.²⁰⁴ As he observes, the first group is comprised of farmer-hunters living in northern states, like George Marvin in New Jersey, who generally pursue the fox on winter nights by the light of the moon and stars. This type of hunter uses a single, deep-voiced hound, his objective being to shoot the fox in its runway, which he is able to accomplish since foxes inhabiting the woodlands have very definite crossing points that remain unchanged for generations. The second category of hilltopper is distinguished by farmer-hunters who may own several hounds; their dogs join up with others belonging to like-minded enthusiasts, the huntsmen and their packs meeting at an appointed hour and location. Like the hilltoppers belonging to the first group, they

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Audubon, Vol. II.: 269.

²⁰⁴ Joseph B. Thomas, M. F. H. Hounds and Hunting Through the Ages. (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, 1937): 19.

pursue their quarry on foot, but “their pleasure is found in the racing of their hounds, which they follow largely by ear; hence their great regard for a good cry, coupled with speed.”²⁰⁵

According to Thomas, hunters riding to the hounds in the orthodox English manner make up the smallest group of foxhunters in the United States. They adhere to a highly formalized approach to the sport as conveyed in their specialized dress and vocabulary, as well as the manner in which the chase is conducted. In contrast, hilltopping evolved out of an early practice of hunting vermin, and since that time has been known by various names, such as “ridge-running,” “forks-of-the-creek foxhunting,” and “one gallus-or one suspender-foxhunting.”²⁰⁶ Whatever label it may wear, hilltopping is the indigenous and informal equivalent of the English manner of foxhunting. While both modes have developed specialized vocabularies and pursue the fox with trained hounds, they differ in almost every other aspect. Whereas foxhunters practicing the English version of the sport pursue the quarry on horseback, hilltoppers seek out the fox in his run. The former carry whips and horns and use their hounds to dispatch the prey, which is referred to euphemistically as “breaking up the fox.” In contrast, hilltoppers of George Marvin’s type employ a shotgun for this purpose. The English tradition of foxhunting is distinguished by a social hierarchy; the participants enrolling in the hunt by subscription. The chase is organized and directed by the Master of the Hunt. Participants, regardless of their social class, are forbidden to pass the Master in the field; any violation of this rule is viewed as being akin to “peeing on the

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Mary Hufford, *Chaseworld: Foxhunting and Storytelling in New Jersey’s Pine Barrens*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992): 5.

President.”²⁰⁷ This tradition of foxhunting is also characterized by a division of labor, as exemplified in the “whippers-in,” the un-sung heroes of the sport, who are responsible for keeping the hounds in line.

Orthodox foxhunters adhere to a formal dress code, though the costume may differ slightly among clubs. The familiar foxhunting attire, which consists of a bright scarlet coat, light-colored britches, black leather boots and cap, first appeared in England during the last decades of the eighteenth century, and this fashionable dress was adopted quickly by many foxhunting clubs in the United States. The association of the scarlet coat with the foxhunt is thought to be due to an historical coincidence: during this period the color red had come to symbolize the conservative Tory Party, blue the Whig Party, and thus foxhunting in the rural countryside became associated with Toryism.²⁰⁸ The hilltopper, in contrast, follows no dress code, his hunting attire consisting of comfortable work clothes, such as overalls, flannel shirts, down vests, and a warm jacket.

This disparity in hunting attire is seen early on in two portraits of American sportsmen painted by Ralph Earl, *Colonel George Onslow* (1782-83) and *A Gentleman with a Gun and Two Dogs* (1784) [figs. 5.10 & 5.11]. The former served as Earl’s first entry in the Royal Academy and could possibly portray a hilltopper as suggested by the subject’s casual hunting attire consisting of a common brown frock coat, a striped vest, and corduroy knee britches. The pheasant’s feather sprouting from the brim of Onslow’s black hat indicates that he is certainly a bird hunter. He cradles a flintlock in the crook of his left arm and tenderly strokes the head of an

²⁰⁷ Rita Mae Brown, *Riding Shotgun*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1996): 65.

²⁰⁸ Longrigg, 119.

adoring and well-fed hound with his right hand. The countryside the hunter and his hound inhabit, although likely fictional, is not the wooded and rocky terrain that is home to the hilltopper, but the kind of flat open environment favored by mounted foxhunters.

In contrast, Earl's *A Gentleman with a Gun and Two Dogs* is a portrait of an English sportsman, though the subject is unidentified.²⁰⁹ He is outfitted in true British hunting attire, which consists of a red woolen hunting coat with turned down collar, brass buttons, and slit-buttoned cuffs, a double-breasted orange vest with gold braid, and tanned leather britches. This style of coat was popular for wearing outdoors, but could also act as formal indoor attire.²¹⁰ The subject's footwear is of a type known as French top boots, which were made of black leather and trimmed in brown at the top; the style became quite popular among foxhunters. He inhabits an open landscape similar to Onslow's, and like the latter, he poses with his flintlock but noticeably leaner hounds, which look off in the direction indicated by his outstretched right arm.

Foxhunters of all persuasions maintain that the excitement of the hunt affords the participant the opportunity to forget the self and escape the worries of everyday life, which they cite as one of its principal attractions.²¹¹ The season for foxhunting, as practiced by traditional hunters, begins in late October or early November, depending on the weather, and closes in late January. Clear, frosty mornings are considered to be ideal for the chase, since the fox's scent is held close to the ground; on such days, departure times can be pushed back to as late as nine o'clock in the morning.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl, The Face of a Young Republic*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991):127. This portrait was housed in an estate in Brighton, England during the nineteenth century; it was acquired by the Worcester Art Museum in 1921.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ See for example Thomas, 21 and Brown, 190.

“Charlie” is the generic name given to the fox until the hunters know exactly which animal they are chasing; however, he may also go by the name of Charles James, Sir Russet, Red Jacket, Reynard, Tod, or dan Russel.²¹² Foxes that repeatedly elude hunters are often given descriptive names, such as Fantail, the nickname given to the red fox in Rita Mae Brown’s novel Riding Shotgun (1996).

Hilltoppers like George Marvin also hunted the fox during the winter months, but in a manner far different from their aristocratic counterparts, as Chapin explained:

Through Spring, Summer, and Fall, George and his dour older brother Emmet worked hard to scrape a living from their stony little hill farm. When Winter set in, it came time to relax, and to provide some relief from the monotony, George hunted foxes. Together with his beloved hound he ranged the surrounding countryside on moonlit nights when the ground was covered with good tracking snow.

Killing foxes had a practical aspect too. When foxes became numerous in farming areas, they take a heavy toll on the farmer’s chickens, ducks, and geese, so hunting them helps to control the losses.²¹³

It is easy to imagine George Marvin hunting on those winter nights long ago, the bright moonlight reflecting off of the newly fallen snow and creating an eerie yet enchanting world in which nature’s forms become abstract and the woods sparkle as though dusted with glittering crystals. The hunter’s steps are quiet and deliberate. He pauses from time to time in order to catch his breath, examine a fresh set of tracks, or peer down a snow-blanketed trail in search of his prey. On those occasions when he encounters a fox, the hunter levels his gun, almost imperceptibly, and takes aim, the shotgun blast shattering the fragile silence hanging over the landscape. One suspects,

²¹² Van Urk, 4. The fox is referred to as dan Russel by Geoffrey Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales. Dan is a title of honor, formerly equivalent to don, master, or sir.

²¹³ James Chapin, in a letter to the Montclair Art Museum, stamped April 10, 1974.

given his limited income, that George Marvin would have taken advantage of New Jersey's bounty on the red and gray foxes, which had been in place for over two hundred years. Instituted in March, 1714, it is believed to be the earliest bounty on foxes anywhere in the United States.²¹⁴

Two years before Chapin's *Fox Hunter* appeared, John Ward Dunsmore produced several paintings illustrating the legendary foxhunts at Mount Vernon, among them *General Washington and His Huntsman and Hounds*, 1924 [fig. 5.12]. It is one of many representations of foxhunting in the English manner, which was enjoying new-found popularity in the United States. Images such as Dunsmore's also underscore the rarity and therefore the significance of Chapin's portrait of a fox hunter. Adhering to conventional renderings of the chase, Dunsmore portrayed Washington in an autumn landscape, mounted on his favorite steed Blueskin, the horse easily and powerfully clearing a gate veiled by shrubbery. However, the horse and rider could almost be mistaken for an equestrian portrait of England's George III (1760-1820). Seated ridiculously erect in the saddle, a decidedly aged Washington exhibits little of the daring horsemanship for which he was much admired. Furthermore, Dunsmore has dressed Washington in a scarlet coat like the other huntsmen in the field, rather than in his distinctive blue coat. Billy Lee, Washington's whipper-in, is portrayed astride the charging Chinkling in the foreground. He leans forward on his mount, demonstrating the gallant type of riding for which his master was known. Billy Lee grasp the reins in his left hand, and looking back over his shoulder, sounds the bugle

²¹⁴ Van Urk, 20. In some parts of the United States a bounty still exists on gray and red foxes, as well as coyotes. According to Russell Muller, who served as my guide in the New Jersey backwoods, at the time Chapin was painting *Fox Hunter*, the state of New Jersey was offering a bounty of approximately \$4.00 on red foxes, a considerable sum in the mid-1920s.

held in his right, indicating that the hounds have un-kenneled a fox and that the chase has begun.

In contrast to Dunsmore's fictional and inaccurate representation of Washington as a foxhunter, Franklin Brooke Voss documented foxhunting's pre-eminence during the 1920s in a series of remarkably detailed paintings, such as the group portrait *Thanksgiving Day Meet in 1923 of the Meadow Brook Hunt* [fig. 5.9]. Peter Winants has described this painting by Voss as "a veritable Who's Who of socially prominent sportsmen in the golden age of the sport on Long Island."²¹⁵ The hunters are shown assembling at Woodside Acres, the country estate of Mr. and Mrs. James A. Burden; Mr. Burden and his youngest daughter Adele stand proudly in front of the mansion. Built in 1917, it is today home to the Woodcrest Country Club. As a member of this society, Voss takes a position among the contingent of sportsmen, and can be seen among the group of mounted hunters at the far right. While works such as this and the related *The Meadow Brook Grays* (1930) afford audiences an insider's view of the sport, Voss's carefully wrought portraits of foxhunters who ride in the familiar aristocratic English manner point out the distinctiveness of Chapin's indigenous and ordinary huntsman.

Perhaps best known for his equine portraits of such legendary racehorses as *Man o' War* (1919), *Billy Barton* (1927), and *Seabiscuit* (1937), Voss was born to a family of foxhunters; his father William was one of the founders of the exclusive Rockaway Hunt Club, which was established on Long Island in 1878. In 1905, after some study at the Art Students League under George Bridgman, Voss produced his first portrait of a foxhunter, depicting his father in an empty countryside astride a

²¹⁵ Peter Winants, *The Sporting Art of Franklin B. Voss*. (Lexington, Kentucky: Eclipse Press, 2005): 106.

thoroughbred named Wizard, clad in the traditional Long Island foxhunting costume of a scarlet coat, leather britches, black leather boots and top hat [fig. 5.13]. The crisp contours used to delineate the horse and rider contrast with the sketchy, hastily-rendered background. William Voss grasps the reins and holds a whip in his left hand. With his right hand, Voss tenderly strokes the mane of his newly acquired mount.²¹⁶ However, both horse and rider appear awkward, their poses contrived and rigid.

Although he became more proficient in his handling of paint, Voss rarely departed from the compositional format he introduced in the portrait of his father, as seen in his portrait of *J. Watson Webb*, which points up the novelty of Chapin's sportsman [fig. 5.14]. Unlike Chapin, Voss placed his formally dressed foxhunter in the customary autumn landscape, mounted on a fine thoroughbred. Webb is attired in the black coat and cap of the Shelburne Hunt Club, located near Burlington, Vermont, where he served as Master of the Hounds for fifty years, from 1905 to 1955. In this region foxhunts were run two to three days a week during the months of September, October, and November, over an open rolling countryside on the eastern shores of Lake Champlain, where Voss situated his subject. Webb is portrayed with a formality that respectfully acknowledges his distinguished position as Master of the Hounds. He is shown astride his favorite mount, Vulture, and attended by five of his dutiful foxhounds. The equestrian portrait endows the subject with the leadership and personal authority of Marcus Aurelius and the Renaissance *condottieri*. Both horse and rider pierce the horizon line, their distinctive profiles set against a sky blanketed with the high clouds of late autumn, indicative of their elevated status, and possibly a one-

²¹⁶ Winants, p. 84. The horse had been recently purchased from Robert North Elder Sr. of Maryland, Voss's cousin.

ness of purpose. Voss preferred to portray his sitters in profile, a time-honored format in portraiture that is thought to record the most distinctive features of the subject, and here the artist employs it to document a special breed of foxhunter.

Voss's mounted, impeccably dressed foxhunter possesses an iconic character and lacks the openness of Chapin's wide-eyed hilltopper attired in a soiled, mail-order canvas jacket. *Fox Hunter* clearly and deliberately departs from conventional renderings of the sport, for as Harry Salpeter once observed, Chapin preferred to paint the unfamiliar.²¹⁷ This desire to depict the uncommon drew the attention of critics who praised the artist for his efforts. Chapin's *Fox Hunter* was reproduced widely in the popular press after its public appearance in the 1920s, and for many years following. Opinions regarding the merits of the portrait were sharply divided. Some critics praised the artist for the novelty of his subject and accepted this unconventional representation of the foxhunter without comment or question. A few writers found the painting bewildering, some arguing that the real sportsman had been pushed aside and in his stead stood nothing but a simple farmer posing with his gun. And yet Chapin's near life-size portrait of George Marvin does indeed portray a foxhunter, more importantly, a special breed of hunter unfamiliar to most Americans, the New Jersey hilltopper.

Walter Gutman was the only critic to offer a thoughtful analysis of Chapin's painting, and while he found much to admire in the artist's handling of his materials, he criticized *Fox Hunter* for having "too little mystery."²¹⁸ However, Gutman tempered his criticism of Chapin's portrait and stated perceptively that "it is the human

²¹⁷ Harry Salpeter, "Chapin: Little Man in Art." *Esquire*. (August, 1940): 106.

²¹⁸ Walter Gutman, "James Chapin" *Art in America*. (October, 1928): 278.

qualities that make his work....His huntsman to the majority would be a farmer with a gun and nothing more. To Chapin he represents ruggedness, alertness, perseverance, and energy. His defects of character are shown, yet he remains a hunter if of a somewhat noble type.”²¹⁹ It is for these reasons and others that Gutman likened Chapin to the sixteenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, observing that both painters shared a love for humanity. As he wrote, their mutual affection for mankind was “a love based on regard for these people as equals...not the false love of pity.”²²⁰

In later years Chapin described *Fox Hunter*'s evolution and he wrote that the painting “was conceived as a full-length portrait of George with his hound at his feet. However, as the picture progressed, interest both formally and pictorially, centered in a three-quarter figure, so the dog could not be included.”²²¹ He further explained that the Marvin portraits were created without any preliminaries for he preferred to set up the canvas and portray the subjects as they were without any advance studies. The Montclair Art Museum, which is home to the portrait, possesses several drawings that possibly have some relationship to the work, though it would be incorrect to view them as studies for *Fox Hunter*. The first sketch depicts a bust of George Marvin, his head capped by the familiar felt hat [fig. 5.15]. As Chapin's handwritten note states, the subject could often be seen during working hours with a large “chaw of tobacco” held in his cheek. The other two pages of drawings are filled with quick sketches of George Marvin's anonymous flop-eared foxhound [figs. 5.16 & 5.17].

Gutman appears to have been correct in his assertion that most viewers of Chapin's *Fox Hunter* would see little more than a farmer posing with his shotgun. In

²¹⁹ Gutman, 280.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ James Chapin. Letter to the Montclair Art Museum, stamped April 10, 1974.

December, 1938, the painting was reproduced on the cover of Scribner's magazine, where it bore the generic title, *Portrait of a Hunter* [fig. 5.18]. Here the identity of George Marvin, a New Jersey hilltopper, ceases to exist. Rendered anonymous, Chapin's stoic huntsman comes to personify the typical American sportsman. However, a brief caption located on an interior page under the title "Fox Hunter" provided the following clarification: "The cold-eyed man with the gun is George Marvin, a New Jersey farmer who did his hunting on snowy nights with the aid of a hound and a thorough knowledge of the local fox runs."²²²

Arnold Blanch's *The Hunter* from 1934 [fig. 5.19] depicts the same type as Chapin's *Fox Hunter*. The shotgun resting against his left shoulder and the two hounds at his feet suggest that he too may be a hilltopper. In contrast to Chapin, Blanch placed his anonymous hunter out of doors in a snow-covered landscape. The hills behind him are separated by narrow wooded draws and ravines, the natural habitat of his intended prey. He is dressed similarly to Chapin's foxhunter and like him he holds the bowl of a pipe in one of his hands. However, Blanch has portrayed his hunter in the field taking a break from his wanderings, enjoying a smoke in the company of his two dogs. Seated on a large flat rock, his jacket open, he looks out of the painting to the left; the hound at his right acknowledges the viewer while the other one looks out of the picture to the right. In this painting Blanch presents the viewer with a picture of the typical American hunter, a relative of the man portrayed on the cover of Scribner's magazine.

²²² "Fox Hunter." Scribner's. (December, 1938): 4.

Chapin revisited the theme of the American hunter in the late 1940s in a painting he created to advertise Maxwell House coffee [figs. 5.20 & 5.21].²²³ Here Chapin placed his subjects, apparently a father and his teenage son, in a tree-lined snowy landscape, coincidentally the kind of terrain characteristic of the old Marvin homestead in winter. Their clothing indicates that the sport of hunting had undergone a change, for like other safety-minded hunters of their day, and today, they wear bright red vests and caps so as not to be mistaken for an animal while in the field. As the accompanying caption explains, their hunt has concluded—due to the absence of any game they have been unsuccessful—and before they make the long trek back home they pause to warm up with a cup of steaming hot coffee, which the father pours from a thermos. Just as he had done for *Fox Hunter* approximately twenty years earlier, Chapin drew his subjects for this composition from the American scene. This time he portrayed two generations of hunters, the type of men who delight in tramping about the woods on a cold winter's day, men like George Marvin and Blanch's unknown huntsman. Maxwell House attempted to capitalize on this notion, and moreover identify with it, as indicated in the caption at the bottom of the advertisement that reads "North, South, East, or West, Maxwell House is truly part of the American Scene."

In the mid-1970s, aware that his life was drawing to a close, Chapin became concerned with finding good homes for the Marvin paintings that were still in his possession. After some careful consideration *Fox Hunter* entered the collection of the Montclair Art Museum, located in Essex County, approximately an hour's drive from

²²³ At this time in his career Chapin was working as a commercial artist and he produced a number of paintings that were used to advertise such products as Maxwell House coffee and Lucky Strike cigarettes.

the Marvin's former residence in Middleville.²²⁴ Roughly fifty miles to the south, one enters an area of New Jersey known as the Pine Barrens; the region is peopled by hill-toppers who, to this day arrive in their pickup trucks to listen to the hounds. The home Chapin selected for *Fox Hunter* seems especially appropriate given that George Marvin represents this breed of American sportsman, the backwoods New Jersey hill-topper.

²²⁴ James and Mary Chapin offered the painting to the Montclair Art Museum as a partial gift in 1974.

Chapter Six

On the Road in a Laundry Truck:

Life off the Farm and the Greater American Scene

You don't get good stuff if you go out and try to be picturesque, mainly because you don't understand what you are painting.

- James Chapin²²⁵

In an article titled “Neglected Fields of American Art,” published in the New York Times Magazine Supplement, December 22, 1901, the anonymous author wrote that American artists of the day paid little attention to the “picturesque phases of American life,” which was regrettable, for as the author warned, some of them were rapidly passing away, “destined soon to disappear forever.”²²⁶ According to the author, one of those areas unexplored by America’s contemporary painters and decidedly rich in picturesque subject matter that speaks of the American experience was the life of the New England farmer. Though he conceded that Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson had devoted some attention to the subject, he maintained that the life of the American farmer remained uncharted territory. The writer stated, “If the peasant life of the Continent is more obviously picturesque, the people of the farms of New England still have possibilities. The man with the hoe there is just as good as

²²⁵ James Chapin quoted in “Pennsylvania Academy Buys Chapin Canvas” Source unknown. Unidentified newspaper article from May, 1940 in the files of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

²²⁶ “Neglected Fields of American Art,” The New York Times Magazine Supplement, December 22, 1901: SM4.

anybody else, and he knows it, in his quiet and entirely self-possessed way. The dramatist long ago discovered this fact and made excellent use of it; but the artist has not yet been found who cared to show the New England farmer as a picturesque type.”²²⁷ Although he chose to lavish his attentions on his native state of New Jersey, Chapin discovered and depicted one of the phases of American farm life in his many pictures of the Marvin family. Chapin believed that the portraits he created of the Marvin siblings were among his best canvases, his “master works” as he often described them. However, Chapin produced many other fine works depicting his experiences on the Marvin farm, from quickly rendered watercolor sketches to carefully composed and fully finished oil paintings. Taken as a series, they constitute one of the first substantial visual records on canvas of American farm life in the early twentieth century and anticipate the many similar representations of rural America that would appear in the 1930s and 1940s.

Unfortunately, Chapin made no inventory of the works he created of the Marvin family and their way of life.²²⁸ Little more than a dozen of them were ever mentioned or reproduced in the press. Further complicating the situation is that a few works like *The Grindstone* (1929-35), an overworked composition depicting Emmet and George Marvin sharpening a blade, were started while Chapin resided on the Marvin farm but finished elsewhere several years later. According to Tom Chapin, the painter’s grandson, Chapin stored the Marvin paintings that remained in his possession in his studio, which was located in an old barn on his property in Glen Gard-

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ See the Appendix for a list of the known paintings associated with the Marvin years. I am hopeful that in time more works will become known.

ner, New Jersey.²²⁹ Due to improper storage and care over several decades, the condition of the paintings deteriorated. Some, such as *Fox Hunter*, were salvaged and restored; others were damaged beyond repair and simply discarded.²³⁰ The Chapin family possesses only a few works from this time. Nevertheless, the works that remain serve as a visual document of the Marvin family and their ordinary, yet extraordinary, way of life.

A large vibrant watercolor sketch titled *Man Sharpening a Scythe* [fig. 6.1] likely depicts George Marvin, Chapin's most agreeable model, from the side. Dressed in a blue denim work-shirt and white overalls, George is shown at work sharpening the blade of a scythe, a motif that calls to mind Eastman Johnson's *American Farmer* [fig. 3.9]. In Chapin's quickly rendered sketch composed of a few lines and colors, the handle of the scythe rests on the ground. George Marvin steadies the blade with his left arm and hand as he sharpens it with a large flat file gripped tightly in his right hand. Although Chapin was fond of making watercolor sketches, some of which he used as studies for larger compositions, he claimed that he discarded most of those associated with the Marvin years. However, a few have turned up recently at online auction sites, suggesting that there may be some works associated with the Marvin years yet to be discovered.

A comparison of two paintings completed shortly after Chapin arrived on the Marvin farm in the summer of 1924, *Pigs in the Barnyard* [fig. 6.2] and *Cows in the Barnyard* [fig. 6.3] demonstrates his struggle to arrive at his own style. *Pigs in the Barnyard* exemplifies Chapin's attempt to imitate Cézanne's late style, with its care-

²²⁹ Interview with Tom Chapin, January 15, 2005.

²³⁰ Conservation records of *Foxhunter* are located in the files at the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey.

ful balance of warm and cool colors and the controlled yet painterly brushwork used to render the animals, the idle farm wagons, the trees, and their foliage. The view is from the ground and inside of an enclosure that is bordered by a split-rail fence. A cow lies in the background beyond the old wooden wagons while a couple of fat, pink, healthy hogs root in the ground for something to eat. With their animated trunks and branches, the trees that form a dense canopy over the barnyard call to mind those found in Cézanne's watercolor sketches of the gardens surrounding his studio in Aix-en-Provence.

Cows in the Barnyard represents the direction that Chapin's style would take. He laid aside his experiments in post-impressionism and began to develop a realistic style that could on occasion drift toward caricature. *Cows in the Barnyard* is a carefully crafted picture. The painting is built on a framework that is composed chiefly of geometric forms—the oval shape of the feedlot, the rectangular and trapezoidal forms of the barn, and the triangular form of the crib. The farmyard, encircled by a stand of mature trees in full leaf that closes off the background, has been sectioned off, each parcel enclosed by a split-rail fence. Structures include a large barn, a crib for storing feed, and another unidentified long narrow structure to the right that lies outside of the fence. The rounded forms of the haystacks in the background soften the harsh straight lines of the architecture. Yet, there is a careful balance of implied vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines used to define the architecture, which adds a pleasing sense of balance to the composition and helps lead the viewer's eye through the farmyard. The viewer looks slightly down on and across a feedlot, perhaps from an upper-story window in the Marvin home. There are eleven cows in the yard; their differing

colors and sizes indicate that they are of different breeds and ages. George Marvin, recognizable with his blue and tan work attire and brown hat, stands just outside the closed door to the barn near the large pile of hay from which one cow feeds. A few lazy clouds drift along in the blue sky overhead. The sun's light strikes the architecture in several places, washing out the color. The cows standing in the yard throw small shadows, suggesting a mid-day hour.

In the 1940s Chapin drew on his first-hand experiences of farm life for a small series of paintings he created to advertise Lucky Strike cigarettes. The advertisements ran in most of the major publications of the day, such as Collier's, Life, and The Saturday Evening Post. A few years earlier Chapin had discovered a way to combine his preference for portraiture with commercial illustration, which proved to be more lucrative than his work as a fine artist. For this commission Chapin traveled to the Carolinas, tobacco country, and the paintings he produced were painted from life. *Boy, That's Tobacco!* [figs. 6.4 and 6.5] appears to have been popular with art directors due to the many variations of the advertisement that exist, in which significant changes were made to page layouts, fonts, and even Chapin's illustration. In an early page layout Chapin's burly tobacco farmer wears a blue denim shirt, bib overalls, and a straw hat that appears to be too small for his head. He is shown standing in what appears to be a harvested field holding a leaf of tobacco in his large working hands. The rich gold color of the tobacco leaf alludes to its value; it is worth its weight in gold as the adage goes. In a subsequent layout Chapin's monumental tobacco farmer is shown apparently rising up out of the earth, perhaps to underscore his connection to the soil [fig. 6.6].

Another painting from the series *Tobacco Talk* [fig. 6.7] depicts a wide-eyed, gray-haired farmer inside of a drying shed proudly displaying a tobacco leaf to two men enjoying presumably Lucky Strike cigarettes. The man wearing a white shirt and tie and grasping one of his suspenders between his thumb and fore-finger is likely a buyer from the big city. In *A Stick of Tobacco Ready for the Market* [fig. 6.8] an enthusiastic tobacco farmer is shown taking down sticks of tobacco from the drying racks hanging inside a shed and readying them for market.

It is a mistake to believe, as some writers have implied over the years, that Chapin went into self-imposed exile on the Marvin farm from 1924-29. While the farm did serve as his primary residence for approximately five years, Chapin made frequent trips to New York City to meet with gallery owners and to work on the few commissions that came his way. It was during these visits to the city that he began to broaden his subject matter and explore the greater American scene. As a newspaper article reported in 1940, “Mr. Chapin became known as the painter of farmers and farming scenes and immediately began to worry lest he become stylized and unable to do anything else. Believing that nobody of any worth ever accomplished anything by staying in one specialized rut, Mr. Chapin branched out and painted whatever he saw, whether it was in the city, the suburbs, or in portrait form...”²³¹

One of the first works to appear during the Marvin years was *Negro Boxer* [fig. 6.9]. Perhaps inspired by Thomas Eakins’ or George Bellows’ many pictures of the boxing ring, Chapin explored the theme of a boxer and his manager in several works. *Negro Boxer* was followed by *A Prize Fighter and His Manager* [fig. 6.10] and a small oil titled *Fighter and Second* (location unknown) from 1933-35. The

²³¹ “Pennsylvania Academy Buys Chapin Canvas”

principal subject of Chapin's *Negro Boxer* is Theodore "Tiger" Flowers (1895-1927), also known as the "Georgia Deacon" of Atlanta, who died in 1927, the year that Chapin produced this canvas.²³² Flowers was the first black boxer to capture the world middleweight championship by defeating Harry Grebs in February, 1926, and in the subsequent rematch. However, in December of that same year in Chicago, Flowers lost the championship to Mickey Walker on points, a decision that drew much controversy. Flowers, a left-handed boxer, helped to reform the image of black prizefighters due to his sobriety, his religious devotion, exemplified by the fact that he carried a Bible into the ring for each fight, and his ability to garner broad support among whites as well as blacks. Flowers moved from Philadelphia to Atlanta in 1920, and there began to train seriously as a boxer. He became an important figure in the black community almost immediately, serving as deacon at the Butler Street CME Church. Flowers died in November, 1927 while undergoing an operation to remove scar tissue from around his eyes. Over 75,000 boxing fans turned out for his funeral. Edward B. Rowen offered an insightful reading of Chapin's painting in 1929 when he wrote, "A powerful negro boxer, glistening with vaseline, sits in a corner of the ring; to one side of him stands the second, smiling confidently to a friend in the audience. The fascination which this picture holds for the spectator is hardly due to the composition which is in itself powerful—a clever pyramidal building up of mass with an interesting and intricate treatment of perspective in the ropes—but rather to the monumental and dig-

²³² Andrew M. Kaye: *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). See also: Kaye, "The Canonization of Tiger Flowers: A Black Hero for the 1920s," *Borderlines: Studies in American Culture*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (1998):142-59.

nified handling of the subject matter.”²³³ Chapin’s painting is in essence a study in contrasting personalities or types, the dignified fighting man of faith and his coarse and cunning manager, whose less than reputable character is seen in his “tobacco stained stumps of teeth and squinting eyes.”²³⁴

Shortly after he painted *Negro Boxer* Chapin created one of his most popular and enduring works, *Ruby Green Singing* [fig. 6.11]. Originally titled *The Negro Spiritual*, the painting was first exhibited at the Rehn Gallery in 1929; it has remained a public favorite ever since. Chapin first encountered Ruby Green singing at a club in New York City. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, Green was a contralto and came to the public’s attention as a singer with Hal Johnson’s Negro Chorus in Manhattan. As with the Marvins, and Chapin’s black boxer, Ruby Green stands for a specific type of American. While she is portrayed as an individual, Chapin intended that she convey the beauty, dignity, and spirituality of her race. As he once stated, his primary intention in this work was to portray “the beauty of Negro music and the Negro people.”²³⁵ *Ruby Green Singing* was voted one of the public’s favorite paintings in the September 28, 1953 issue of Time magazine, some twenty-five years after it was painted. The anonymous author clearly grasped the artist’s intentions when he wrote, “His [Chapin’s] obvious purpose is to make each of his subjects more than a mere personality on canvas; he tries to express ways and qualities of life.”²³⁶

As Christopher Hume has written of Chapin’s work, *Ruby Green Singing* is a superb example of the portrait painter’s art—clean, economical with not an ounce of

²³³ Edward Rowen cited in “Negro Boxer Becomes Preacher’s Memorial” The Art Digest (April 1, 1929): 9.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ James Chapin quoted in “Public Favorites” Time (September 28, 1953): 72

²³⁶ Ibid.

excess paint or sentiment.²³⁷ More recently, Dr. M. Therese Southgate has observed that,

Ruby Green Singing has that rare, often intangible quality that successful portraits have: the power to cause the viewer to forget that the work is merely a painting, that it is only a little pigment on a strip of cloth. In Chapin's work the viewer feels almost immediately that this is not merely a painting, but Ruby herself; that the viewer knows Ruby and has known her for a long time, much as one knows a close friend or member of one's family. Chapin accomplishes this with the warm tones of the simple red dress against an even more simple gold background.

More importantly, Chapin allows Ruby to tell the story: her up-turned head, her straight, proud body, her clasped hands, her slightly parted lips, her eyes fixed on something beyond our vision, but something that we know she will in turn describe for us. Ruby is not merely singing: she is praying, speaking to the world from the wordless silence of the human spirit.²³⁸

While still living on the Marvin farm Chapin began to earn a reputation for his sensitive and sympathetic portraits of African-Americans, such as *Negro Boxer* and *Ruby Green Singing*. In these paintings and later works like *Blues Concert* (1937), a portrait of the well-known jazz singer Ethel Waters, and *Father and Son* (c.1935), Chapin demonstrated a profound break with the past which promoted stereotypical portrayals of African-Americans in secondary, often humorous roles. In his landmark publication The Negro in Art, author Alain Locke called attention to Chapin's pictures of African-Americans and declared that he had been a "pioneer in exploring the deeper traits and personalities of his Negro subjects."²³⁹

²³⁷ Christopher Hume, "James Chapin at the Yanoff Gallery," *Artmagazine* (February/March, 1981): 49

²³⁸ M. Therese Southgate, MD. "Ruby Green Singing," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 285 no. 11, March 21, 2001: page numbers unknown.

²³⁹ Alain Locke, The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and the Negro Theme in Art. (Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940): 140.

Exploring the American Scene in a Laundry Truck

In a 1940 interview for *Esquire* magazine Chapin confided to the reporter Harry Salpeter that he was in many ways a man without a home, which had its advantages since it had forced him to make the most of his own resources.²⁴⁰ As Salpeter observed, “Chapin was torn between the desire to be accepted by a group and the desire to be left alone, a temperamentally solitary man not strong enough to stand on his own.”²⁴¹ Whether it was by necessity, as recounted in Chapter Three, or a belief that he had exhausted the possibilities of the Marvins and their country, Chapin vacated his cabin on the Marvin farm early in 1929 and returned to New York City. That summer he purchased an old laundry truck and set out alone for the coast of Maine. He rented a fisherman’s cottage where he cooked his meals and ate them; he slept and worked in the truck. It was during this road trip that Chapin painted *Uriah Peabody, Lobster Fisherman* [fig. 6.12]. From first appearances, Uriah Peabody looks as though he could be a relative of the Marvin family, or one of their itinerant farmhands, due in part to his monumental form, his working-man attire, and the direct gaze of his clear blue eyes. The strong pyramidal form of the subject, which carries connotations of permanence and stability, is placed against the interior wall of a shed, which enhances the three-dimensional quality of the sitter, an effect that Chapin sought to convey in his portraiture. Uriah Peabody appears significantly older than any of the Marvins as evident in his unkempt, shock-white hair and the aged, translucent skin that covers his face and hands. Yet, despite his age this fisherman continues

²⁴⁰ Harry Salpeter, “Chapin: Little Man in Art,” *Esquire*, August, 1940: 107.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

to work, as seen in the wooden lobster traps near him, which he appears to be either constructing or mending.

Chapin maintained a busy schedule throughout the 1930s, contributing his impressions of the American scene to more than twenty exhibitions, from the East Coast to the West Coast and many points in between, such as The Dayton Museum of Art, Dayton, Ohio (1932), The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota (1933), and The Society of Liberal Arts, Omaha, Nebraska (1934). In 1939 Chapin criss-crossed the United States and as Esquire's Harry Salpeter reported, "he made artistic hay by seeing as much of the country as he could coming and going."²⁴² Chapin's work from the 1930s drew exclusively on the American scene and his cast of characters broadened to include such American types as lumbermen, laborers, road workers, musicians, baseball players, actresses, bar flies, and even a gunman and his female companion.

In 1940, the year of his retrospective exhibition sponsored by Associated American Artists of New York, Chapin was invited to Hollywood, California along with eight of his American scene colleagues to create pictures that would be used in an advertising campaign to promote John Ford's motion picture *The Long Voyage Home*, "a rousing drama of the sea" based on four of Eugene O'Neill's one-act plays.²⁴³ Chapin was in impressive company indeed, for the eight other painters invited to Hollywood were, Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, George Biddle, Ernest Fiene, Robert Phillip, Luis Quintanilla, Raphael Soyer, and George Schreiber; this unprecedented commission resulted in eleven paintings. The promoters of this enter-

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ "The Long Voyage Home as Seen and Painted by Nine American Artists," American Artist, September, 1940: 4.

prise, chiefly the Hollywood studio of Walter Wanger and Associated American Artists of New York, envisioned “an alliance of the picture industry with the art of painting as a forerunner of a whole new field of income for artists.”²⁴⁴ It also offered the public an opportunity to see nine different approaches to the art of painting, as evidenced in the artists’ different procedures and techniques. There were three specifications spelled out in the commission. First, the artists were to have complete freedom of choice in regards to what they chose to paint. Secondly, they were to have studios on the movie lot and a projection room at their disposal in order to view each day’s rushes. Finally, they were to have complete access to all of the sets and the film’s cast members had to make themselves available for sittings.²⁴⁵

Discussing the subject of his painting and his approach to the commission Chapin stated, “In running over the rushes for ‘The Long Voyage Home,’ Yank’s death seemed to offer good dramatic material for a painting. The actors involved, Ward Bond, Joseph Sawyer, and Wilfred Lawson, have fine, strong heads, and I used them regrouped somewhat to make a better composition from the painter’s standpoint.”²⁴⁶ The painting Chapin created has no resemblance to any actual scene in the film for, as he stated, the artist’s approach to the story is fundamentally different from the director’s [fig. 6.13]. Chapin, who preferred to work directly from the model, had the actors pose for him between shootings in order to make detailed drawings of them, these sketches leading him to define the personality of the characters. The painting is in essence a death-bed scene, an image of a young dying sailor whose life ended prematurely on the sea.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

Approximately four years after his work on *The Long Voyage Home* Chapin was awarded a commission from CIBA Pharmaceutical Products Incorporated for seven paintings that were to illustrate an in-house publication titled *Seven Ages of a Physician*, which was designed as a tribute to the medical profession. The introduction to the paintings reads in part:

While the collective title *Seven Ages of a Physician* paraphrases Shakespeare's seven ages of man, obviously it is not presumed to include the paraphrase in the content of the paintings themselves. They have been designed as a tribute to the science of healing and to those great men of medicine whose devout selflessness has had an almost religious significance. So the hope has been to preserve in the pictures this sense of devotion and, as much as might be, an echo of its timelessness.²⁴⁷

In the seven paintings he created for this commission, which trace the life of a doctor from infancy to retirement, Chapin was careful to avoid any specific references to time and place in order to bestow a sense of timelessness upon the seven scenes that comprise the narrative. Although each painting could stand on its own as a self-sufficient work of art, it was necessary that the group of seven works be a functioning whole in form and content. One of the paintings, titled *The Doctor in War*, depicts a physician on the battlefield, attended by a nurse, who is about to provide a wounded soldier with an injection that will ease the pain coursing throughout his body [fig. 6.14]. Soldiers from every branch of the Armed Forces fill the crowded background, all of them bearing wounds and waiting quietly under a darkened sky for the doctor's services. The doctor's selfless character is the subject of another work titled *Research Heroic: The Self-Inoculation* [fig. 6.15]. In this painting, one of the

²⁴⁷ *Seven Ages of a Physician*. Summit, NJ: CIBA Pharmaceutical Products Incorporated, 1944.

most interesting of the group due to Chapin's handling of the materials, a doctor, situated in a laboratory and wearing a lab coat, is shown injecting himself with a new serum before he administers it to any of his patients. The color lithographs that comprise the publication were designed to be detached and framed according to the directions at the back of the pamphlet.

The images that make up *Seven Ages of the Physician* show that Chapin's paintings were becoming overtly narrative and sentimental in their content and style. This may be due in part to the fact that Chapin became a father again in 1942 with the birth of his second son, Elliot. In the late 1930s Chapin and his second wife Mary purchased a pre-Revolutionary farmhouse near Glen Gardner, New Jersey in order to raise a family. His work from this time shows that Chapin took pleasure in being a doting father. He created a painting of his son taking his first steps titled *Here I Come!* (1944), another representation of him absorbed in a picture book [fig. 6.16], and still another one of Elliot seated at a window with a book in his lap and day-dreaming, which served as the cover for the August 9, 1947 issue of Collier's magazine [fig. 6.17]. The public could purchase quality lithographs of any of these works, published under the auspices of Associated American Artists, for ten cents in stamps as advertised in Collier's magazine and elsewhere [fig. 6.18].

Chapin's work as a commercial artist came to an exceptional close in the late 1950s with a series of commissions he received from Time to create portraits of some of the most important personalities of the day, which were to serve as cover illustrations for the magazine [figs. 6.19-6.24]. Technically speaking, these paintings constitute some of Chapin's finest work as a portraitist. Also, judging from the works them-

selves, it appears that Chapin sought to capture not only a likeness of the sitter's physical features but also a convincing likeness of their personality, as seen in his representations of baseball star Birdie Tebbetts and jockey Willie Hartack. Chapin also painted the novelist James Cozzens and the Russian writer Boris Pasternak, who had found success in the 1950s with the publication of his epic novel Dr. Zhivago. In addition, Chapin was enlisted to paint important political figures of the day such as the first African-American Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and the Prime Minister of India Jawaharal Nehru. Interestingly, one of the first commissions Chapin received from Time was for a portrait of Edward Hopper [fig. 6.25]. Reportedly Chapin and Hopper, both loners by nature, established a close and long-lasting friendship during the many sittings Chapin requested. The portrait is one of Chapin's best works, with the inclusion of the lighthouse in the background serving as a reference to one of Hopper's favorite motifs.

The portraits that Chapin created for Time were the last of his works to reach a large audience. He settled into a comfortable semi-retirement. As he told a reporter for the magazine in 1953, he rose early and painted seven mornings a week and he added, "Since the house is so old, there's always work to do in the afternoon. I do enough gardening so the boys can have fresh vegetables. Sometimes I play a little tennis. It's a very pleasant life."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ James Chapin quoted in Time September 28, 1953: 72.

Conclusion

It is doubtful that James Chapin actually discovered the American scene when he took up residence on the Marvin farm in the summer of 1924, as some of his supporters believed. However, there is no question that he was one of the pioneers of this nativist movement in American art, which coalesced in the 1930s. Chapin's remarkable story, the five years he spent living and working side by side with the Marvin family in the backwoods of New Jersey, as well as the extraordinary artworks that resulted from that unique experience, made for good press in the 1930s; and he received his fair share of it. Yet today Chapin and his once-celebrated Marvin series remain relatively unknown, the artist name seldom heard in discussions of American painting. This study represents an attempt to correct that situation, and yet much work remains.

Ironically, Chapin achieved his measure of fame during the economic downturn of the Great Depression and to be fair, he owed much of that success to the Marvin paintings. He never equaled that achievement. Chapin intended to say something with this series of canvases. As this study has demonstrated, his message was not lost on contemporary audiences. Sometime after he arrived on the farm, Chapin came to realize that the Marvins were more than simple farm folk eking out a living in the hill-country of New Jersey. He took up their way of life for approximately five years. He assisted them in the planting and harvesting of crops, he tended livestock, he helped them mow fields, and he surely lent a hand when it came time to take down a tree for lumber or firewood. From these shared experiences, Chapin developed a

life-long appreciation for honest work. Moreover, he came to see the Marvin family and their ordinary, yet uncommon, way of life as representative of some basic American values, such as independence and perseverance in the face of adversity. He believed that the Marvins' struggles and triumphs could serve as a lesson for all Americans. And for a time they did.

Throughout the 1930s art critics, newspaper reporters, and the general public responded to these works positively and they bestowed a significant amount of praise upon the artist. Several paintings, such as *Emmet, George and Ella Marvin*, *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith*, and *Old Farm Hand (Joseph Titman)*, garnered prizes.²⁴⁹ It is possible that some members of Chapin's audience encountered people they recognized in these paintings. Perhaps, they saw a resemblance to their parents or grandparents, who had once been farmers. Census records from the 1890-1910s confirm the number of farm families in the United States had fallen significantly by the time Chapin arrived on the Marvin farm; they comprised about a third of the general population. The economic calamities of the 1920s and 1930s, natural disasters like the Dust Bowl, as well as the advent of industrialized farming practices, would hasten their decline. By the middle of the twentieth century farmers would account for little more than a tenth of the entire population, and their numbers have decreased since. Therefore, Chapin's Marvin paintings, though informed by his own day to day experiences, were essentially nostalgic representations of rural America when they

²⁴⁹ In 1928 *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith* was awarded the Temple Gold Medal, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Two years later *Emmet, George and Ella Marvin* won the Popular Prize at the Carnegie Institute's Twenty-Eighth International Exhibition in Pittsburgh. That same year *Old Farmhand (Louis Titman)* received The Logan Portrait Award from the Art Institute of Chicago.

made their public debut; the painter portrayed a way of life that had already become a distant memory for many Americans.

Nevertheless, Chapin considered his portraits of the Marvin family to be his finest work. Unfortunately, they have been exhibited rarely since 1940. Several of the paintings had remained in his possession until a few years before his death when he became concerned with finding good homes for them. Even on the two occasions that Chapin was honored with solo exhibitions in the mid-1970s and early 80s, some of the most important works from the Marvin years were not on view.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the critics and audiences responded favorably to the works on display, a few writers echoing the sentiments expressed by their colleagues several generations earlier. Christopher Hume, who reviewed Chapin's show at the Yaneff Gallery in 1981, believed that they showed the painter to be at the top of his game, and as he wrote, the artist's "gift for a likeness has not often been surpassed."²⁵¹

Chapin adhered to the realist tradition in American art throughout his career; he never ventured into the realm of pure abstraction or nonrepresentational art. Like many artists of his generation he was forgotten when the art world shifted its focus from realism to formalist issues. The fact that Chapin began and ended his career as a commercial artist also worked against him, damaging his reputation as a fine artist. When he began painting earnestly again in the 1960s Chapin's skills had deteriorated and his pictures became exceedingly sentimental. He had lost his ability to capture the personality or character of his subject. Although he had always labored over his paintings, some taking years to complete, many of his late canvases appear heavy-handed,

²⁵⁰ The first exhibition was at the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey in 1974, and the second, seven years later, 1981, at the Yaneff Gallery, in Toronto, Canada.

²⁵¹ Hume, 49.

the compositions overworked and lacking in quality as in *Folk Singers (Homage to Joan Baez)*, 1967.

Chapin lived well beyond the period of his greatest success, the Marvin paintings. From 1924 to 1929 he focused his attentions on a small corner of America, a farm located near Middleville, New Jersey. In those five years Chapin produced an important body of work. He introduced American audiences to a rugged and self-sufficient farmer, Emmet Marvin, and his elder, unmarried sister Ella. He portrayed their brother George Marvin as a back-country hilltopper. He created second portrait of George but this time accompanied by his young daughter Edith. In other paintings, Chapin depicted the Marvins working their farm, engaged in seasonal tasks like planting potatoes and harvesting fields of grain. Collectively, the paintings and sketches form an ambitious and in-depth visual document of one New Jersey farm family in the late 1920s, and for that reason the series can be called an epic of the American farm. Importantly, Ella, George, and Emmet Marvin were the last of their line to farm that plot of land near Middleville. Their descendents moved away. The farmhouse and outbuildings fell into decay. The property went into foreclosure for non-payment of taxes; it was sold in the mid-1970s. Nature has reclaimed much of what was once the Marvin farm. All that remains today are remnants of a few foundations that once supported small structures. Chapin arrived on the Marvin farm at the right time, before their way of life passed away unnoticed. It is important to recognize that this series of works made its public debut just as the American scene was beginning to take shape. Chapin was indeed at the forefront of this new direction in American art. For these reasons and others, Chapin and the Marvin paintings warrant attention.

Appendix I

Known paintings and sketches from James Chapin's *Marvin Series*, 1924-1929

Emmet, George and Ella Marvin also known as *The Marvins* (1926), Trenton: The New Jersey State Museum

Emmet Marvin, Farmer (1926), Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection

Miss Ella Marvin (1925), Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art

George Marvin and His Daughter Edith (1926), Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

The Foxhunter (1926), Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum

The Grindstone (1928-1935), Chapin Family Collection, Long Island, New York

Sow and Sucklings Asleep (1925), Chapin Family Collection, New York

Planting Potatoes (1925), Chapin Family Collection, New York

Country Lane (1925), Chapin Family Collection, New York

Barn and Trees (1925), watercolor, Chapin Family Collection, New York

Pigs in the Farmyard (1924), watercolor, Chapin Family Collection, New York

Woman Churning (1924), watercolor, Private Collection

Man Sharpening a Scythe, (1925), watercolor, Newark Museum of Art, Newark, New Jersey

Cows in the Barnyard (c. 1924), oil on canvas, Collection of Glenn White

Old Farm Hand, (Joseph Titman) (1926), oil on canvas, Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois

Sketch of George Marvin, c. 1929, pencil drawing, Montclair Art Museum

Sketches of George Marvin's Foxhound, c. 1929, pencil drawings, Montclair Art Museum

Two Men Fishing (c. 1925), present location unknown

Old Horse, (c. 1925), present location unknown

Two Calves, (c. 1925), present location unknown

A Farmer Cradling Grain (c. 1929), present location unknown

Two men Sawing (c. 1929), present location unknown

Appendix II

James Chapin and the Marvins by Grant Wood

One of the great stories of modern American art is that of the conquest of James Chapin by the Marvins, a simple farm family of lower New Jersey.

Sixteen years ago, Chapin, then 37 years old, left New York City to return to the farmlands of the New Jersey hills. He went, not for romantic reasons or to find picturesque subject matter, but because he was broke and had to live cheaply if he was to go on painting.

Like most American artists of that period, he had been experimenting with the various ultra-subjective schools of French Modernism. He took a log cabin on the Marvin farm and prepared to continue exactly what he had been doing in New York. He had no idea that the change in environment might make any difference in his work. His only thought was that in the country, released from financial pressure, he would have time to synthesize his own style out of a welter of foreign influences. He felt, as the saying goes, that he would find himself.

Instead he found the Marvins, a plain American farm family who moved in upon his imagination and took possession of it.

Forgetting his preoccupation with pure form, Chapin went to work painting the Marvins as he saw them day by day. It was a different kind of work from what he had been doing, infinitely more exciting, and out of it evolved the answer to his formal problems. For in his effort to interpret these people honestly, he attained a style of his own and produced work which, both from the standpoint of design and representation, was far superior to anything he had done before.

In fact, the Marvin paintings were the best thing in American art, strong and solid as boulders. They were full of the pain and bleakness of a frugal existence on the land, yet possessed a subtle, melancholy beauty of their own. They established James Chapin in the front rank of American painters.

Here was a modern demonstration of the old paradoxical truth—that to find himself, the artist must first lose himself in his subject.

Since that five-year period he spent in the New Jersey hill country, Chapin has turned to other phases of American life: the prize ring, the theatre, the city streets. He has produced an impressive and varied body of work in portraiture, genre and landscape. But always in his best work, whether it is a pretzel vendor, a famous actress, or a negro boxer, we find the same qualities that distinguish the Marvin paintings—the stern honesty, solid technical construction, and infinite human sympathy which are valid in any time or place.

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Illustrations



Fig. 1.1: James Chapin, *Bruges Gossips*, c. 1910-12
Etching, Private Collection

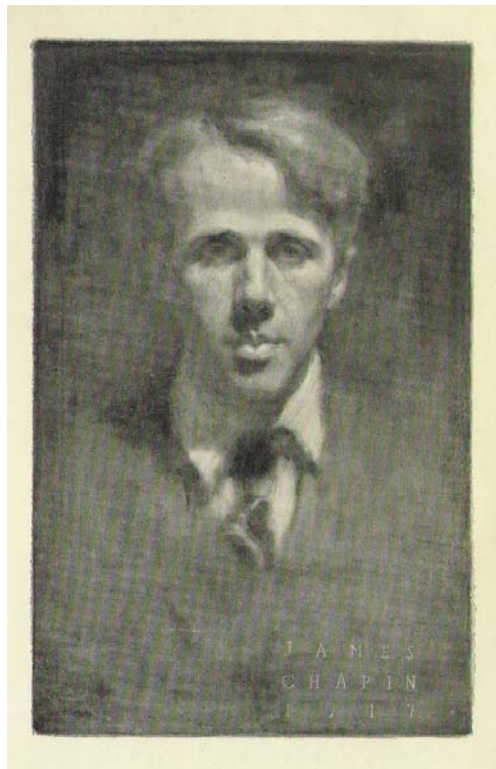


Fig. 1.2: James Chapin, *Robert Frost*, 1917
Frontispiece to North of Boston (1919), Location of painting unknown



Fig. 1.3: James Chapin, *Robert Frost*, 1929
Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts

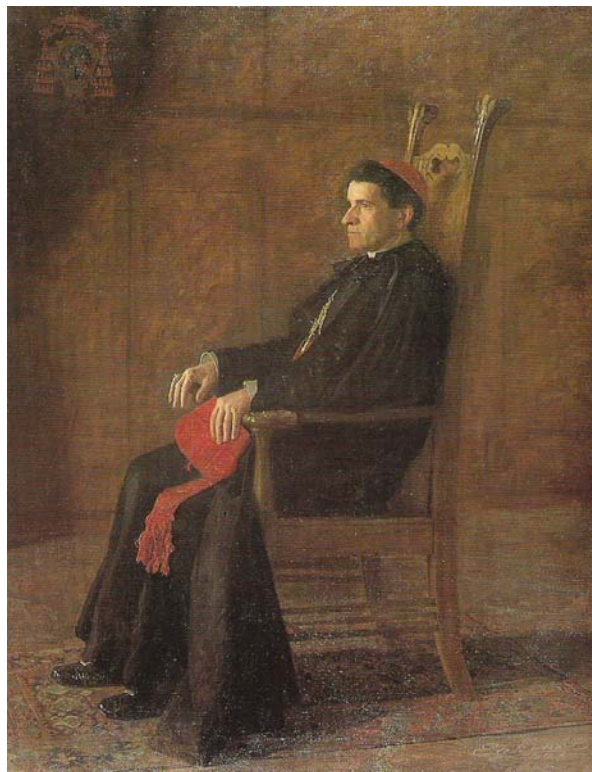


Fig. 1.4: Thomas Eakins, *Sebastiano Cardinal Martinelli*, 1902
The Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, California



Fig. 1.5: James Chapin, *Young Robert Frost in New Hampshire*, 1964-72
James Cox Gallery, Woodstock, New York



Fig. 1.6: James Chapin, Illustration for *A Hundred Collars*
From North of Boston, 1917



Fig. 1.7: James Chapin, Illustration for *A Servant of Servants*
From North of Boston, 1917



Fig. 1.8: James Chapin, Illustration for *Mending Wall*,
From North of Boston, 1917



Fig. 1.9: James Chapin, Illustration for *The Death of the Hired Man*,
From North of Boston, 1917

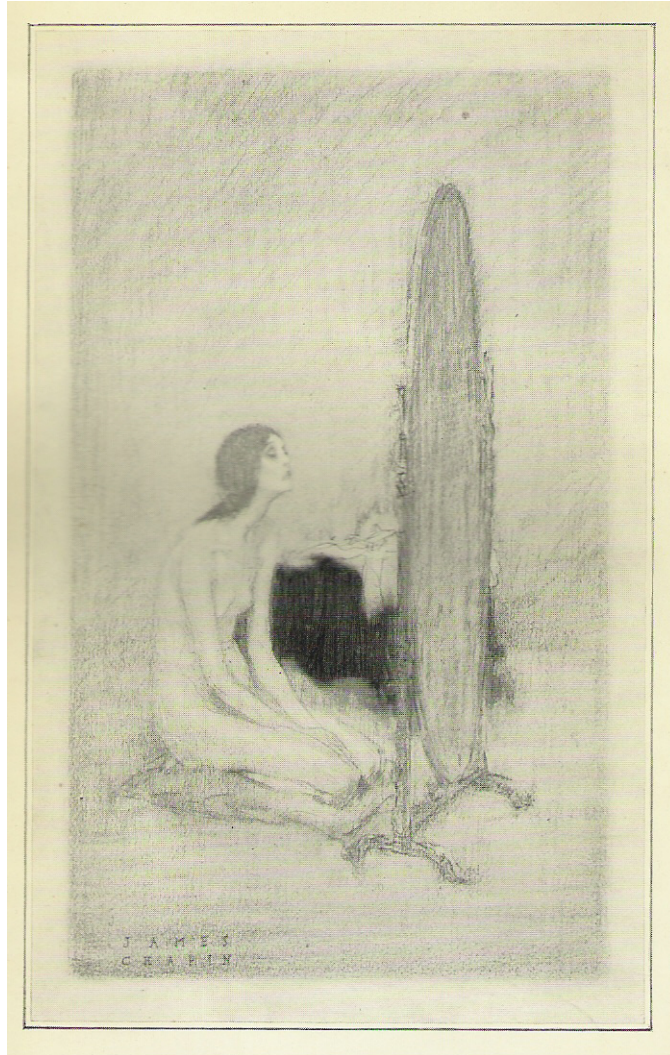


Fig. 1.10: James Chapin, Illustration for *Home Burial*,
From North of Boston, 1917

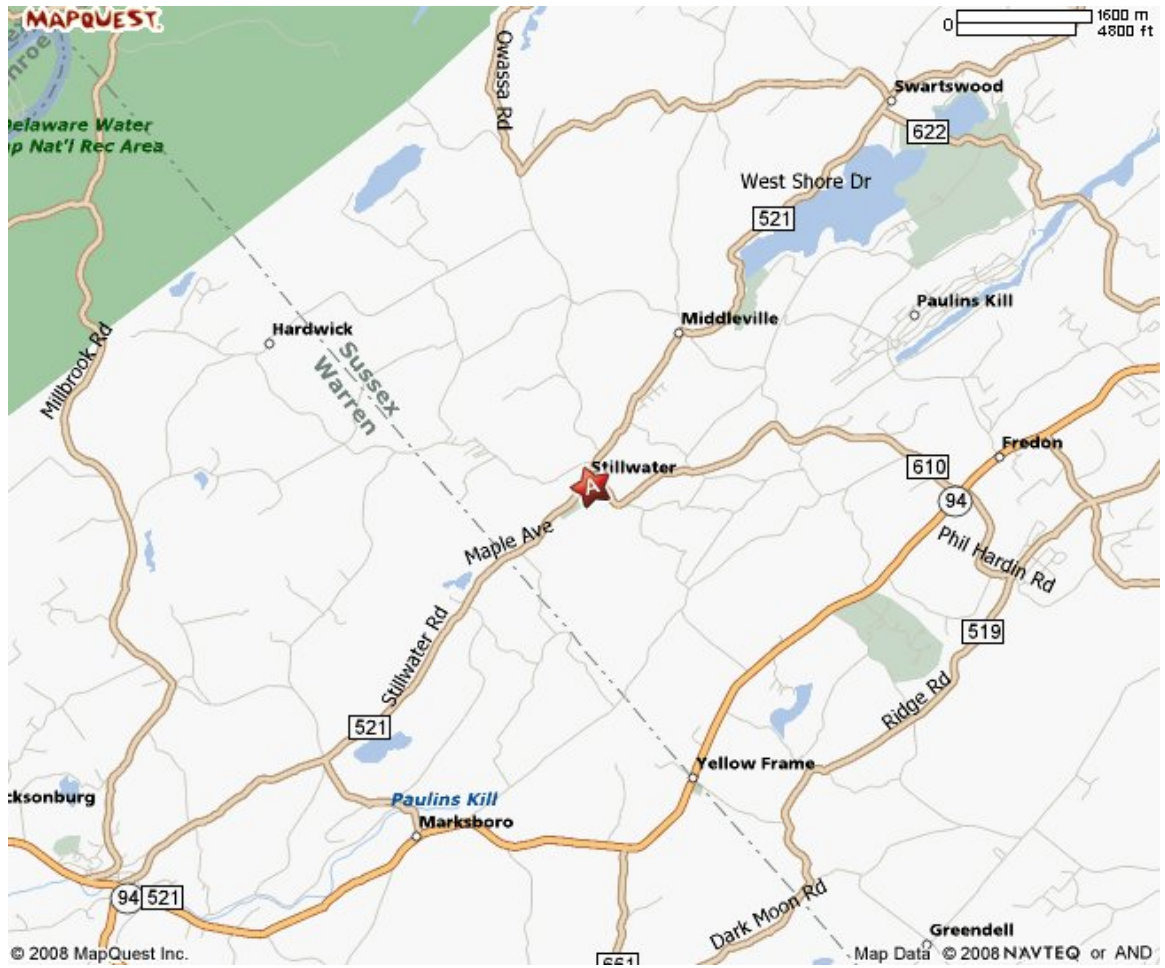


Fig. 1.11: Map showing the townships of Stillwater, Middleville, and Swartswood, New Jersey



Fig. 1.12: Postcard of Robbins General Store, c. 1907, much as it appeared in 1924 when Chapin arrived in Middleville.



Fig. 1.13: James Chapin, *Emmet, George, and Ella Marvin*, 1926
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton



Fig. 1.14: Joseph Whiting Stock, *The Farnum Children*, 1855
New York Historical Society, New York City

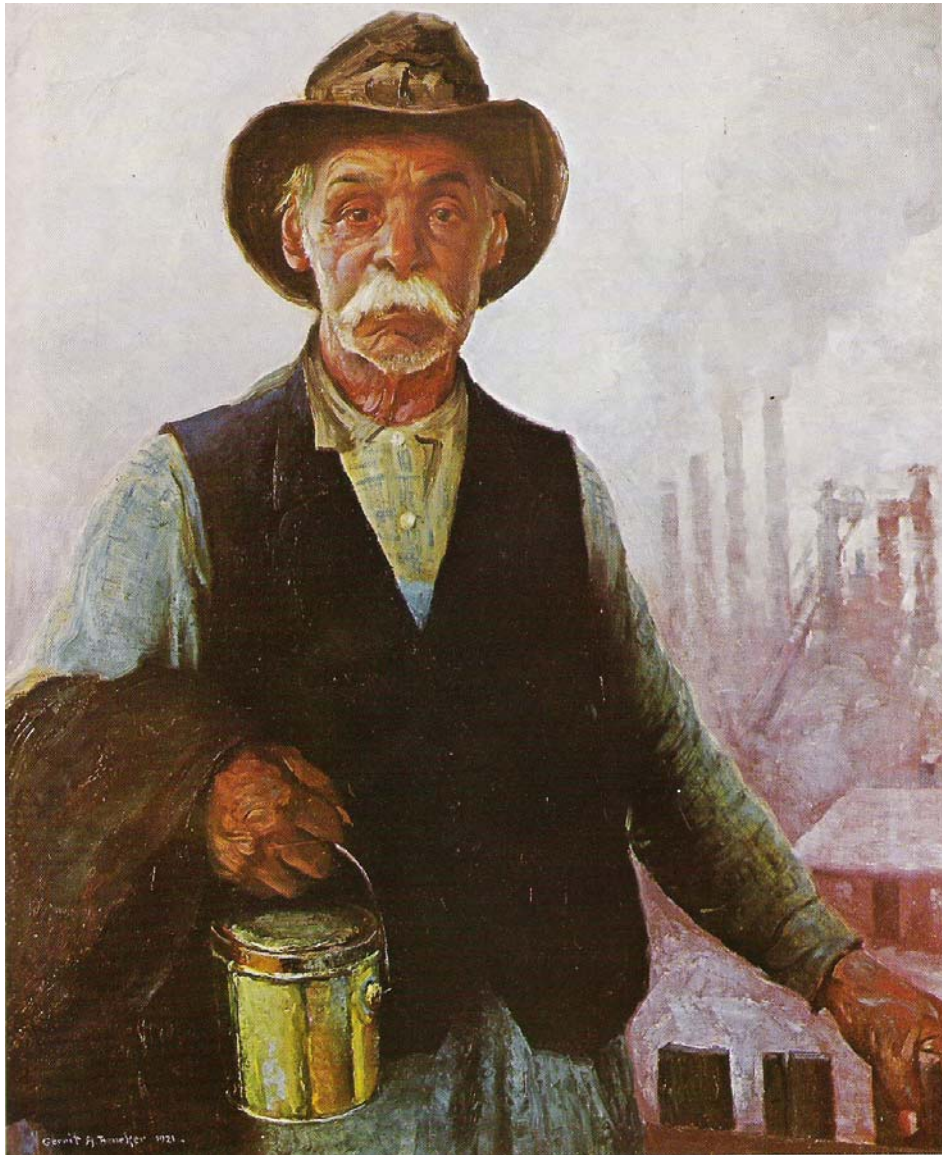


Fig. 1.15: Gerrit Beneker, *Rufus Payne*, 1921
Hydraulic Pressed Steel Co., Cleveland, Ohio



Fig. 2.1: James Chapin, *Miss Ella Marvin*, 1925
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana



Fig. 2.2: Winslow Homer, *The Dinner Horn*, 1872
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC



Fig. 2.3: Winslow Homer, *Milking Time*, 1875
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington



Fig. 2.4: Paul Cezanne, *Woman with a Coffee Pot*, c. 1890-95
Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France

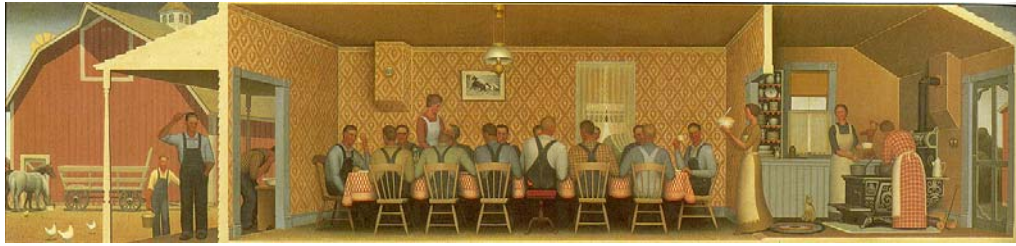


Fig. 2.5: Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*, 1934
The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, California



Fig. 2.6: Doris Lee, *Thanksgiving*, c. 1936
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois



Fig. 2.7: James Chapin, *Woman Churning*, 1925
Private Collection



Fig. 2.8: John Falter, *Amber Waves of Grain*
Cover for The Saturday Evening Post September 8, 1945



Fig. 2.9: John Falter, *Waiting for the School Bus in Snow*
Cover for The Saturday Evening Post February 1, 1947



Fig. 2.10: John Falter, *Muddy Walk Home*
Cover for The Saturday Evening Post May 13, 1950

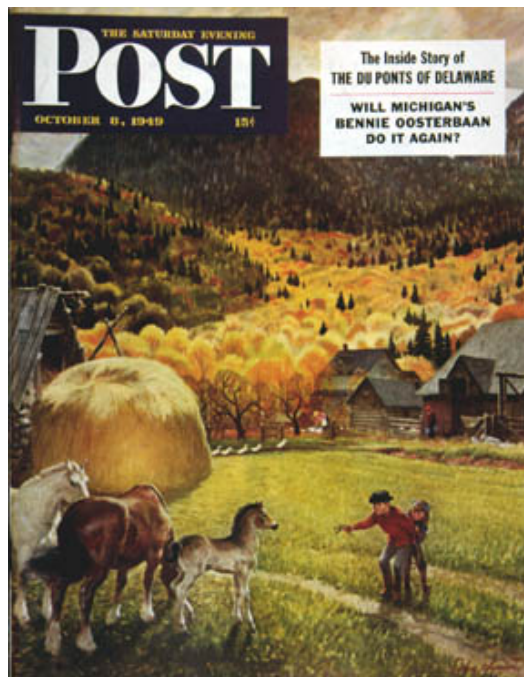


Fig. 2.11: John Clymer, *Belgium Horse Farm*
Cover for The Saturday Evening Post October 8, 1949



Fig. 2.12: John Clymer, *Snow on the Farm*
Cover for The Saturday Evening Post December 22, 1954



Fig. 2.13: Dale Nichols, *Company for Supper*, 1939
Location unknown



Fig. 2.14: Dale Nichols, *Come to Supper*, 1939
Georgia Museum of Art, Athens



Fig. 2.15: Stan Backus, *Thank God for Mail*, 1939
The Buck Collection



Fig. 2.16: John Falter, *Letter from Overseas*, Cover for The Saturday Evening Post May 8, 1943



Fig. 2.17: Steven Dohanos, *The Dinner Bell*, Cover for The Saturday Evening Post October 21, 1944



Fig. 2.18: Steven Dohanos, *Chicks in the Incubator*, Cover for The Saturday Evening Post March 5, 1949



Fig. 2.19: Steven Dohanos, *Frozen Laundry*, Cover for The Saturday Evening Post March 8, 1952



Fig. 3.1: James Chapin, *Emmet Marvin, Farmer*, 1925
The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC



Fig. 3.2: Junius Brutus Stearns, *Washington as a Farmer at Mount Vernon*, 1851
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond



Fig. 3.3: *Gift for the Grangers*, 1873, Private Collection



Fig. 3.4: John Steuart Curry, *My Father's Hands*, 1929
Location unknown



Figure 3.5: Marie Atkinson Hull, *Sharecroppers*, 1938
Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson



Fig. 3.6: William Sydney Mount, *Bargaining for a Horse*, 1835
New York Historical Society, New York City



Fig. 3.7: Francis William Edmonds, *Hard Times*, 1861
Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, St. Joseph, Missouri



Fig. 3.8: Eastman Johnson, *American Farmer*, 1870
Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine



Fig. 3.9: Thomas Waterman Wood, *American Farmer*, 1874
New York State Historical Society, Cooperstown



Fig. 3.10: John George Brown, *American Farmer*, 1908
Arkell Museum of Art, Canajoharie, New York



Fig. 3.11: Arnold Blanch, *The Farmer*, 1934
Location unknown

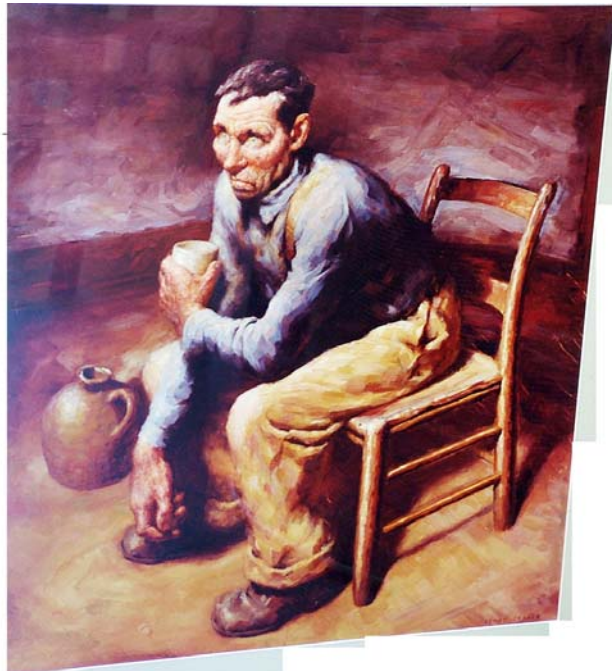


Fig. 3.12: James Chapin, *Drunken Farmer*, 1929
Private Collection



Fig. 4.1: James Chapin, *George Marvin and His Daughter Edith*, 1926
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia



Fig 4.2: Rembrandt van Rijn, *John Pellicorne and His Son Gaspar*, c. 1634
The Wallace Collection, London England



Fig. 4.3: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Susanna Van Collen and Her Daughter Eva Susanna*, c. 1634
The Wallace Collection, London, England



Fig. 4.4: Ralph Earl, *Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge and His Son George Washington Tallmadge*, 1790, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut



Fig.4.5: Ralph Earl, *Mrs. Benjamin Tallmadge and Her Son Henry Floyd and Daughter Maria Jones*, 1790, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut

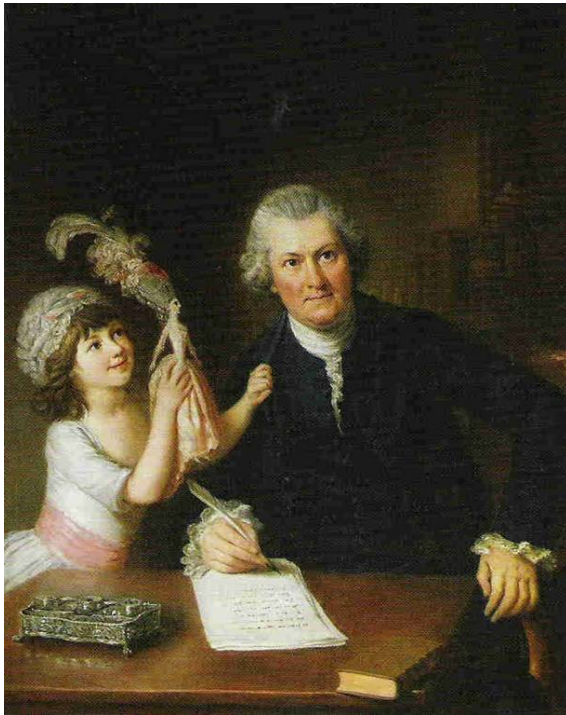


Fig. 4.6: William Hoare, *Christopher Anstey and His Daughter*, 1771
National Portrait Gallery, London, England



Fig. 4.7: John Singleton Copley, *Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwait*, 1771
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

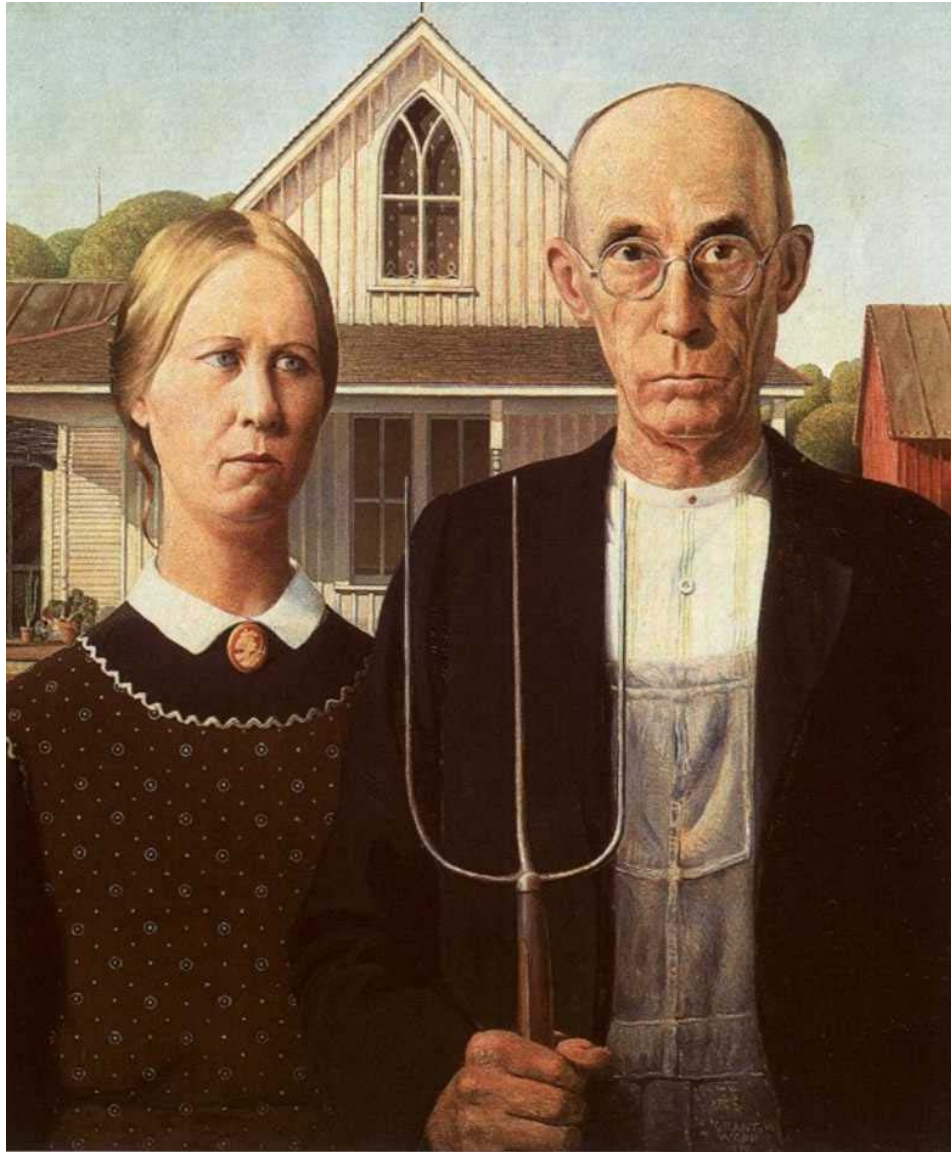


Fig. 4.8: Grant Wood *American Gothic*, 1930
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois



Fig. 4.9: Grant Wood, *The Farmer's Daughter*, 1932
Cox College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Fig. 4.10: *The Farmers Daughter*, Life, October, 6, 1941



Fig. 4.11: Jules Erbit, *Farm Beauties*, 1950s, Private Collection



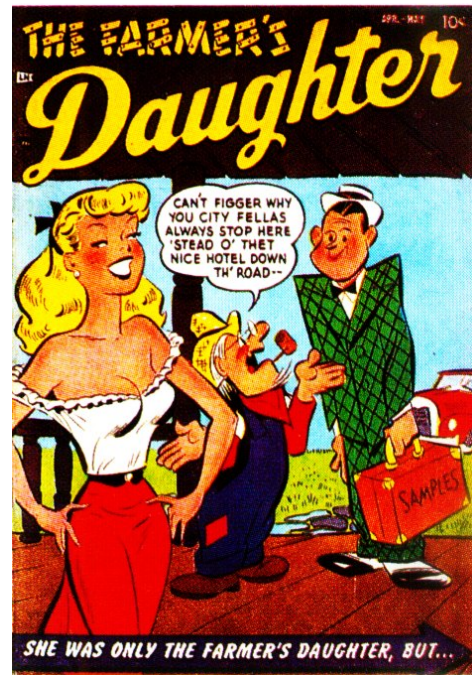
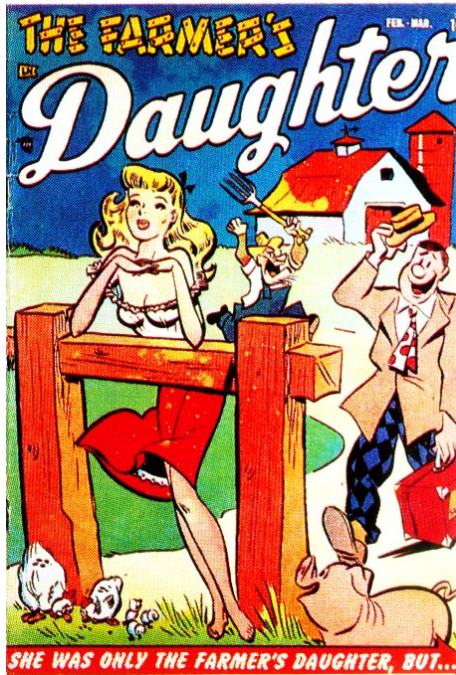
Fig. 4.12: Walt Otto, *The Farmer's Daughter*, c. 1950



Fig. 4.13: Walt Otto, *Fishing*, c. 1950



Fig. 4.14: Walt Otto, *Puppies for Sale*, c. 1950



Figs. 4.15 & 4.16: *The Farmer's Daughter*, Trojan Comics, 1950s



Fig. 4.17: Loretta Young in *The Farmer's Daughter*, RKO Studios, 1947

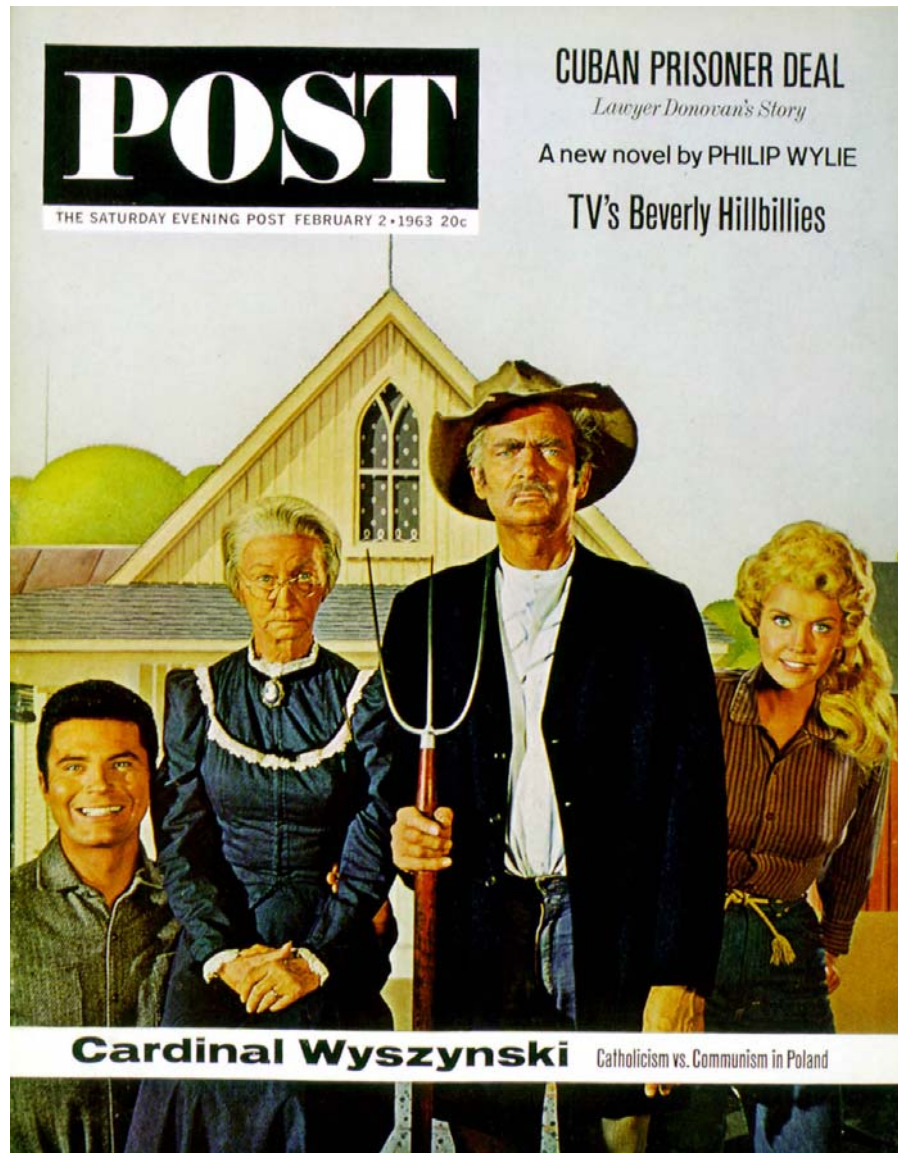


Fig. 4.18: Allan Grant, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, The Saturday Evening Post, February 2, 1963

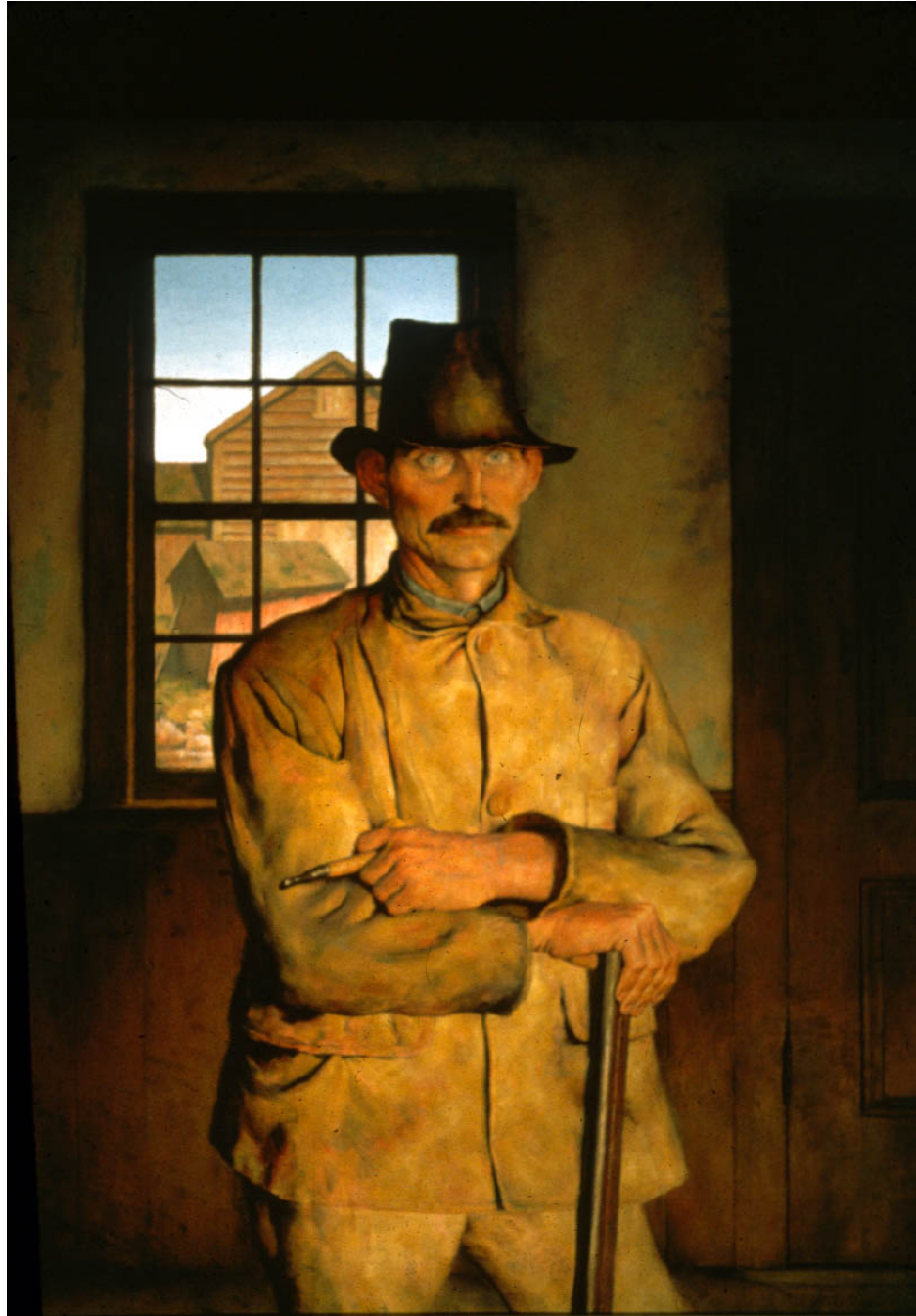


Fig. 5.1: James Chapin, *Fox Hunter*, 1926
Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey

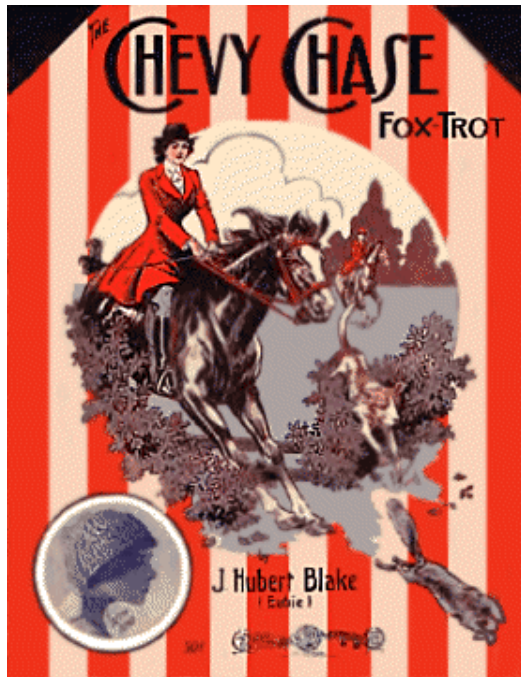


Fig. 5.2: J. Herbert Blake, *The Chevy Chase Foxtrot*, 1914

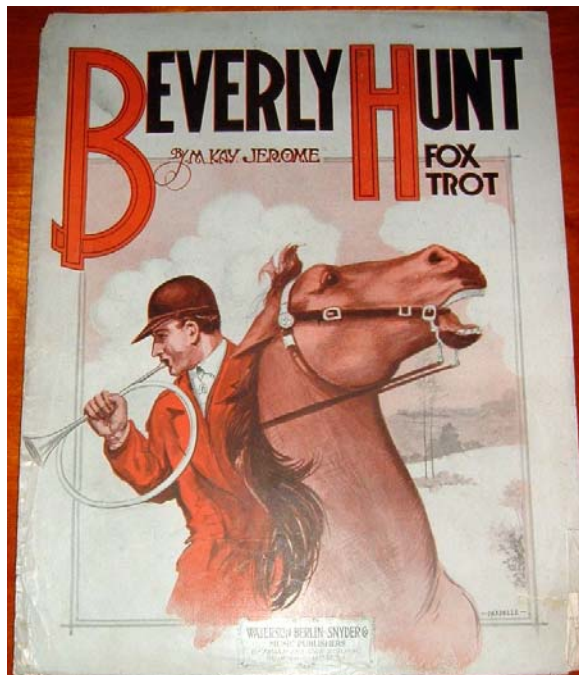


Fig. 5.3: M. Kay Jerome, *The Beverly Foxtrot*, 1915



Fig. 5.4: Anonymous, *About to Move Off (Mr. Truehart's Hounds)*, c. 1780-1800
National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C.



Fig. 5.5: Anonymous, *With Brush in View (Mr. Truehart's Hounds)*, c. 1780-1800
National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C.



Fig. 5.6: Currier & Ives, *Fox-Hunting, The Death*, c. 1846



Fig. 5.7: George Rowlandson, *The Check*, c. 1850



Fig. 5.8: Heywood Hardy, *The Kill*, c. 1875



Fig. 5.9: Franklin B. Voss, *Thanksgiving Day Meet in 1923 of the Meadow Brook Hunt*, 1923
Private Collection



Fig. 5.10: Ralph Earl, *Colonel George Onslow*, 1782-32
Collection of Mrs. Ralph Earl



Figure 5.11: Ralph Earl, *A Gentleman with a Gun and Two Dogs*, 1782-32
Worcester Art Museum



Fig. 5.12: John Ward Dunsmore, *General Washington and His Huntsman and Hounds*, 1924
Collection of the Sons of the Revolution, Fraunces Tavern, New York



Fig. 5.13: Franklin Brooke Voss, *William Voss*, 1905
Collection of Thomas H. Voss



Fig. 5.14: Franklin Brooke Voss, *J. Watson Webb*, 1923
Collection of Shelburne Museum

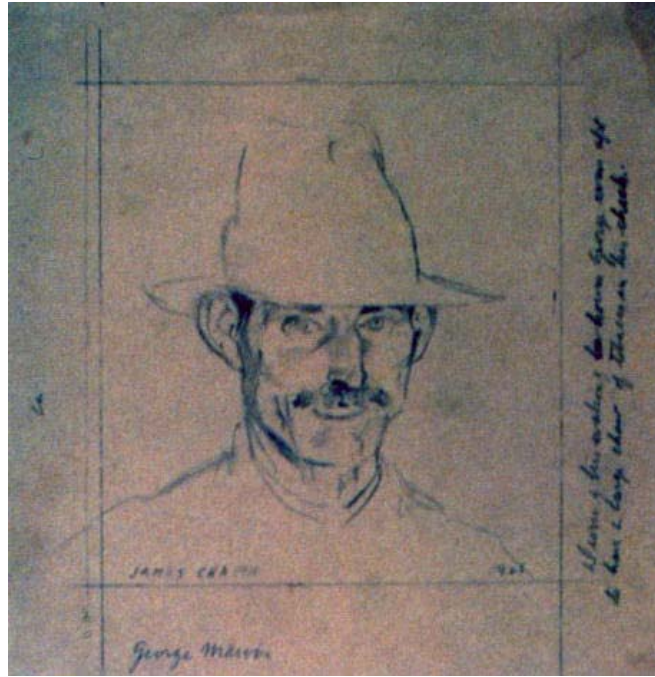


Fig. 5.15: James Chapin, Sketch of George Marvin, c. 1929
Pencil drawing, Montclair Art Museum



Figs. 5.16 & 5.17: James Chapin, Sketches of George Marvin's Foxhound, c. 1929
Pencil drawing, Montclair Art Museum

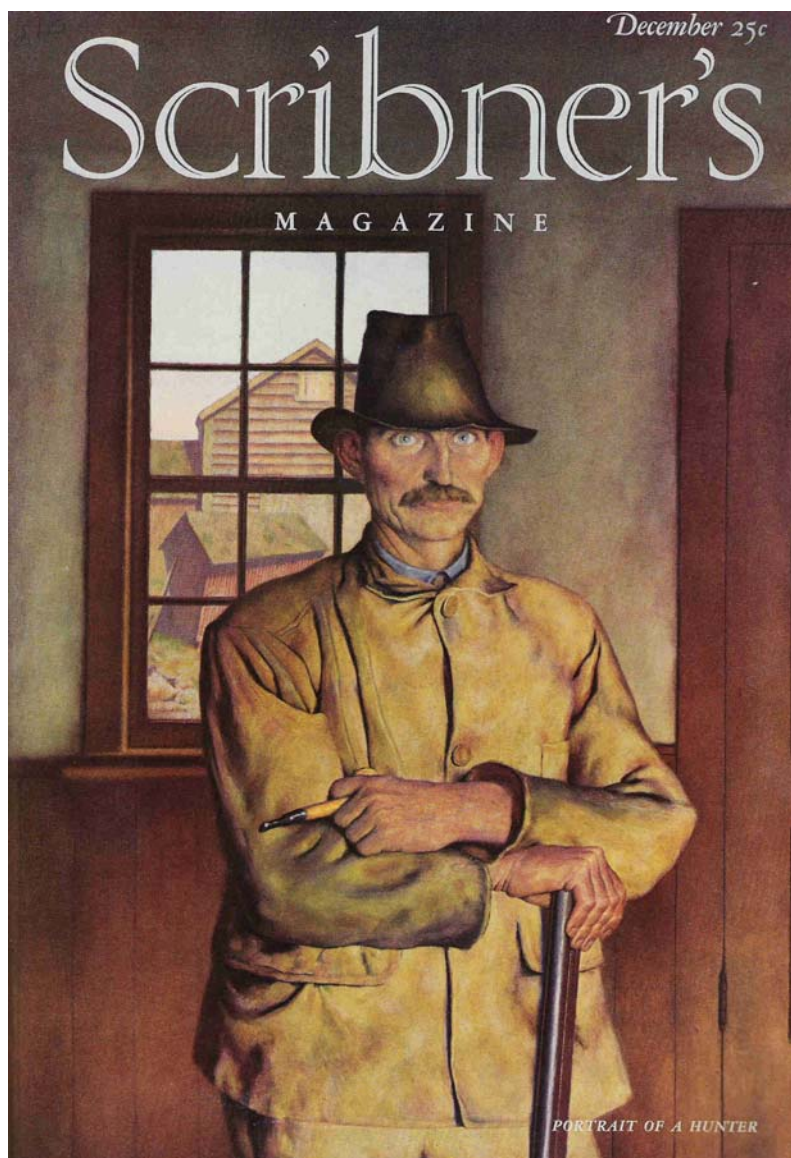


Fig. 5.18: James Chapin, *Fox Hunter*, Scribner's, December, 1938



Fig. 5.19: Arnold Blanch, *The Hunter*, 1934
Abbott Laboratories, Chicago, Illinois



Fig. 5.20: James Chapin, *Coffee Time*, c. 1948
Advertisement for Maxwell House Coffee

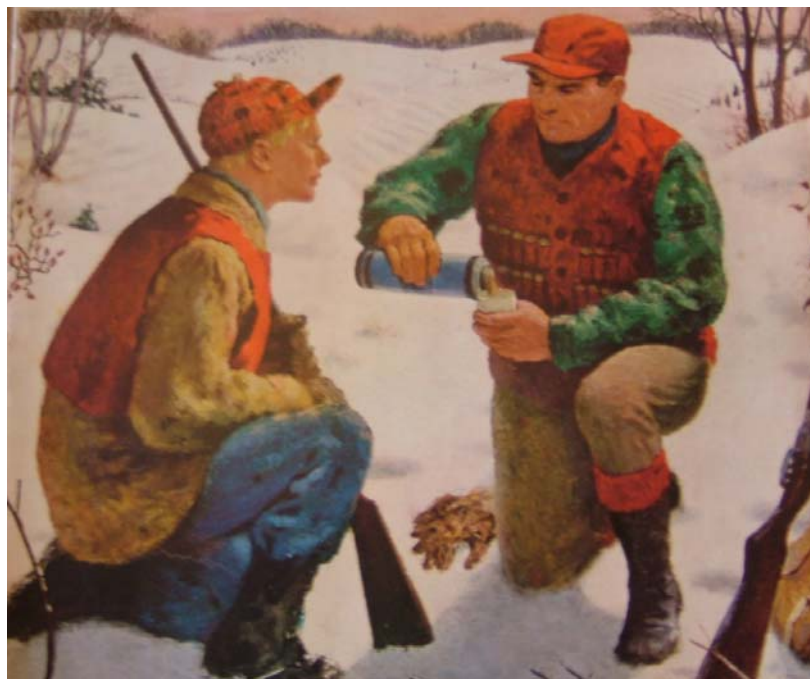


Fig. 5.21: James Chapin, *Coffee Time*, c. 1948

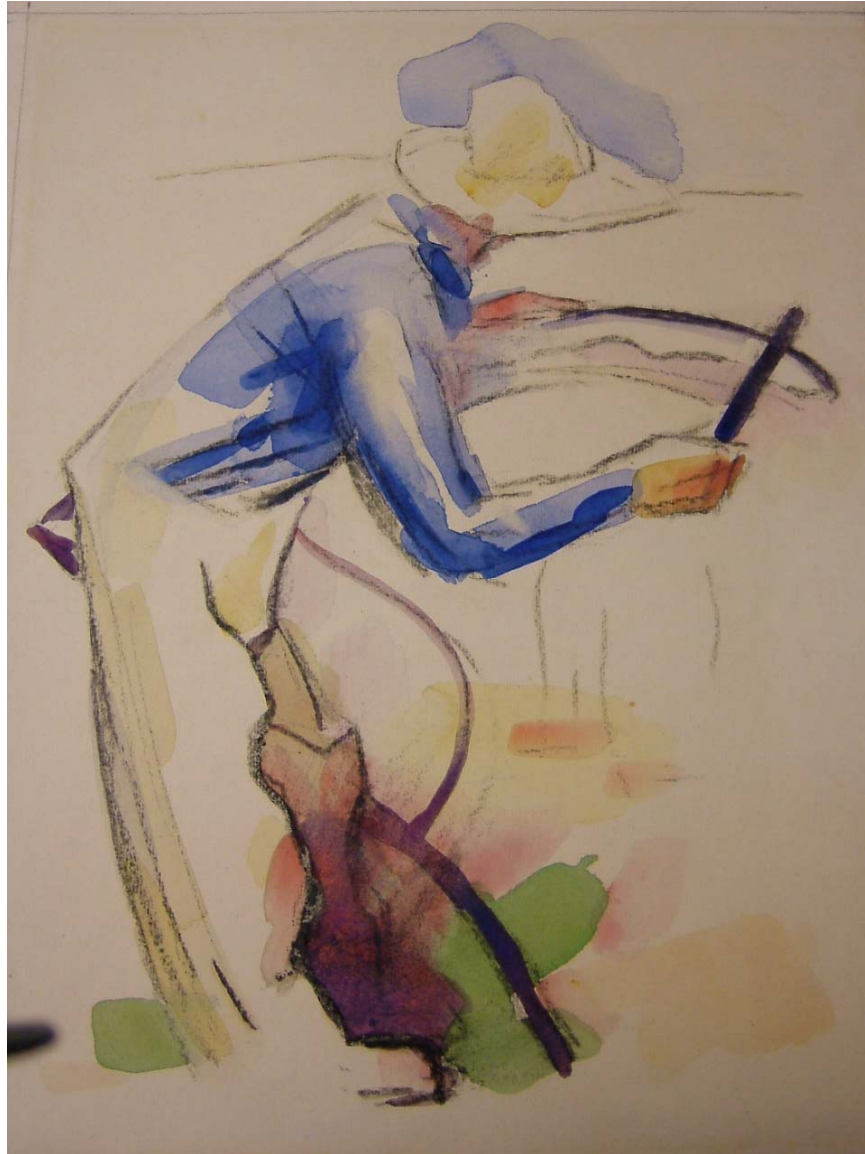


Fig. 6.1: James Chapin, *Man Sharpening a Scythe*, c. 1924
Newark Museum of Art, Newark, New Jersey



Fig. 6.1: James Chapin, *Pigs in the Barnyard*, c. 1924
Private Collection

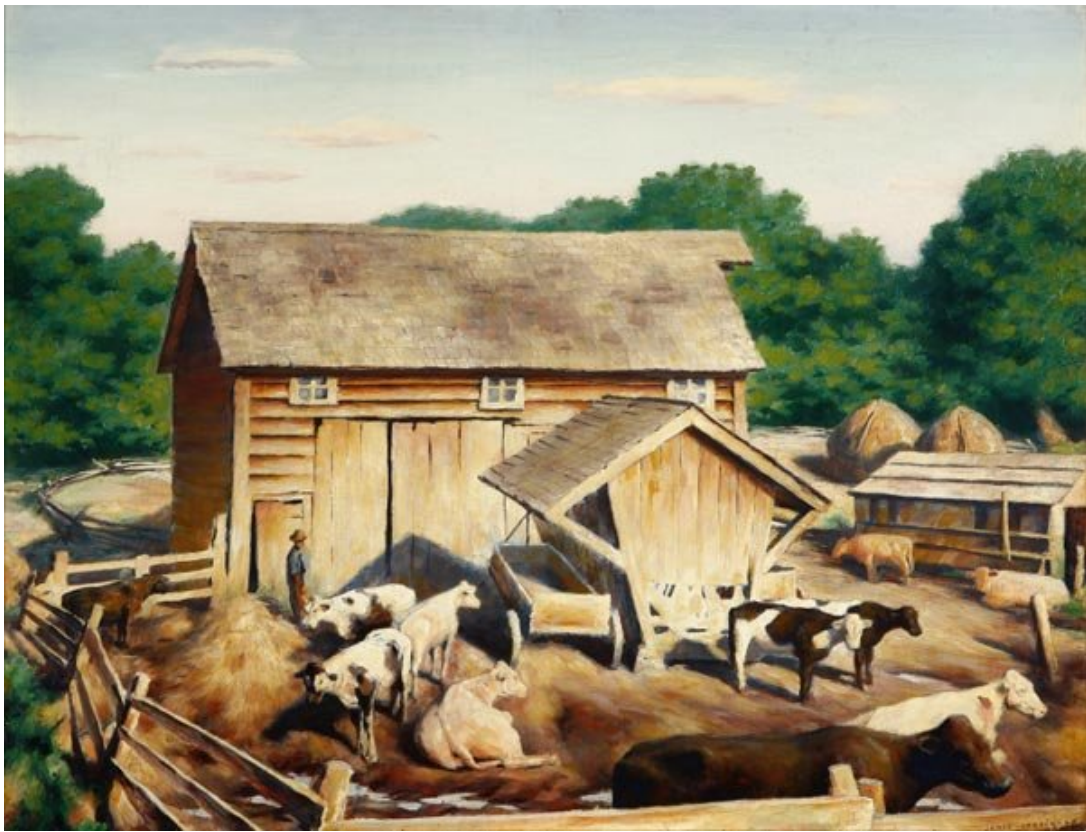


Fig. 6.3: James Chapin, *Cows in the Barnyard*, c. 1924
Collection of Glenn White

LUCKY STRIKE MEANS FINE TOBACCO!
One of a series of paintings of the tobacco country by America's foremost artists



"Boy, That's Tobacco!" Painted from life in the tobacco country by James Chapin.

IN A CIGARETTE, IT'S THE TOBACCO THAT COUNTS
...and Lucky Strike means fine tobacco! Independent tobacco experts—buyers, auctioneers, warehousemen—see us consistently pay the price to get the finer, the milder leaf... These men make Lucky Strike their own choice by more than 2 to 1.
Isn't that worth remembering...worth acting on...next time you buy cigarettes?

With men who know tobacco best—it's Luckies 2 to 1



Fig. 6.4: James Chapin, *Boy That's Tobacco!* c. 1942
Illustration for Lucky Strike Cigarettes



Fig. 6.5: James Chapin, *Boy That's Tobacco!* detail, c. 1942
Illustration for Lucky Strike Cigarettes



Fig. 6.6: James Chapin, *Boy That's Tobacco!* c. 1942
Illustration for Lucky Strike Cigarettes



Fig. 6.7: James Chapin, *Tobacco Talk*, c. 1942
Illustration for Lucky Strike Cigarettes

LUCKY STRIKE MEANS FINE TOBACCO!

One in a series of notable paintings of the tobacco country by America's foremost artists



A "stick" of tobacco ready for the market. Painted from life on a Carolina farm by James Chapin

WE PAID 40%* MORE IN LAKE CITY, S. C., TO BRING YOU MILDER, BETTER-TASTING TOBACCO!

MILLIONS of smokers like yourself know that a cigarette is only as good as the tobacco that's in it... and not one whit better.

That's why the makers of Luckies pay the price to get the milder, better-tasting leaf, all over the tobacco country.

Just as an example:—At the tobacco auctions in Lake City, S. C., this season, we paid 40% above the average market price. Yes, 40% more, so you could enjoy milder, better-tasting leaf in your Lucky Strike.

This was in no way unusual. We paid well above the average market price in every one of 119 markets last season. And the best we buy goes into Luckies.

To independent tobacco experts, Lucky Strike means fine tobacco. With these men who know tobacco best—auctioneers, buyers and warehousemen—it's Luckies 2 to 1.

In a cigarette, it's the tobacco that counts. Remember that... and next time you buy—act on it... ask for Luckies!

*Based on average market price, U. S. Department of Agriculture.



WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO BEST—IT'S LUCKIES 2 TO 1

Fig. 6.8: James Chapin, *A Stick of Tobacco Ready for the Market*, c. 1942
Illustration for Lucky Strike Cigarettes



Fig. 6.9: James Chapin, *Negro Boxer*, 1927
Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York City



Fig. 6.10: James Chapin, *A Boxer and His Manager*, 1930
Georgia Museum of Art, Athens



Fig. 6.11: James Chapin, *Ruby Green Singing*, 1928
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida

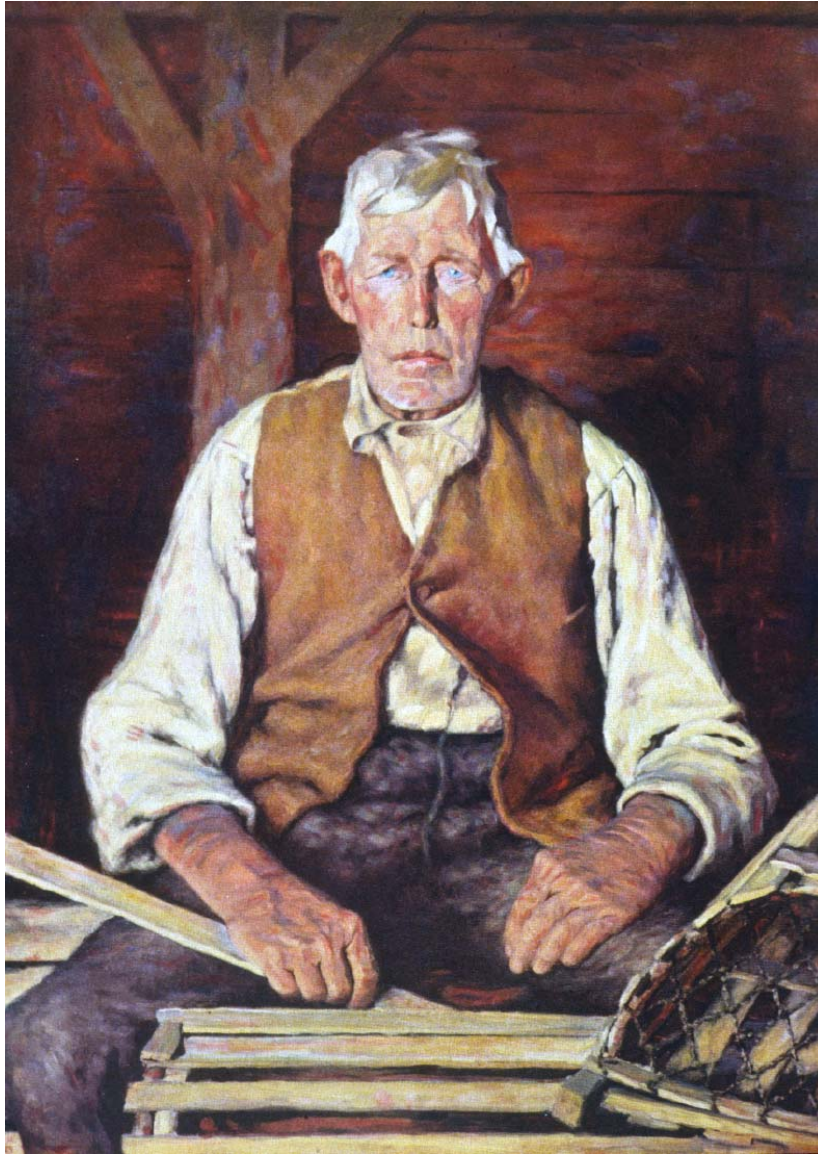


Fig. 6.12: James Chapin, *Uriah Peabody, Lobster Fisherman*, 1929
Abbot Laboratories, Chicago, Illinois



Fig. 6.13: James Chapin at work on his painting for John Ford's *The Long Voyage Home*, 1940



Fig. 6.14: James Chapin, *The Doctor and War*,
from Seven Ages of a Physician. 1944
Private Collection

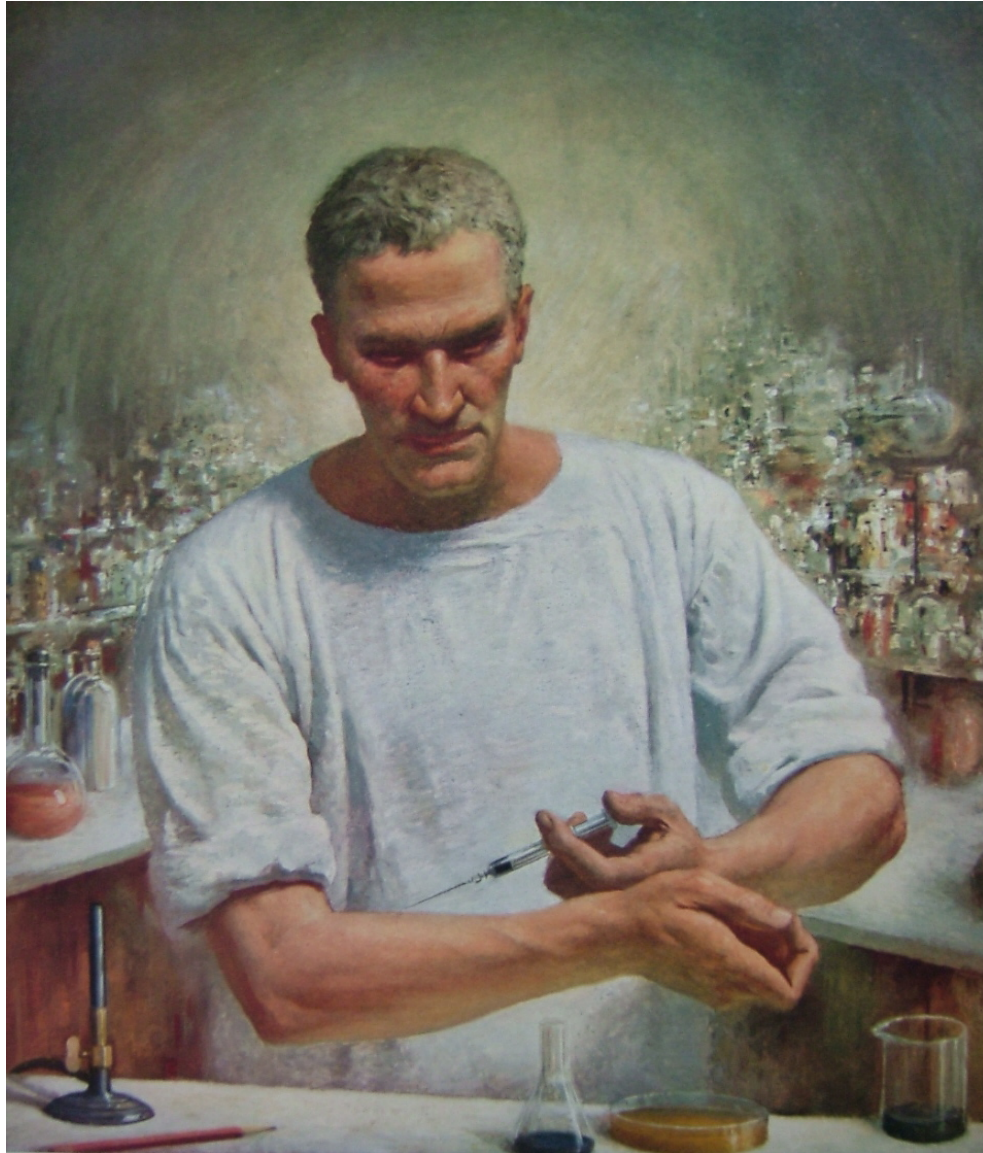


Fig. 6.15: James Chapin, *Research Heroic: The Self-Inoculation*,
from Seven Ages of a Physician. 1944
Private Collection



Fig. 6.16: James Chapin, *Boy with a Book*, lithograph, 1944
Private Collection

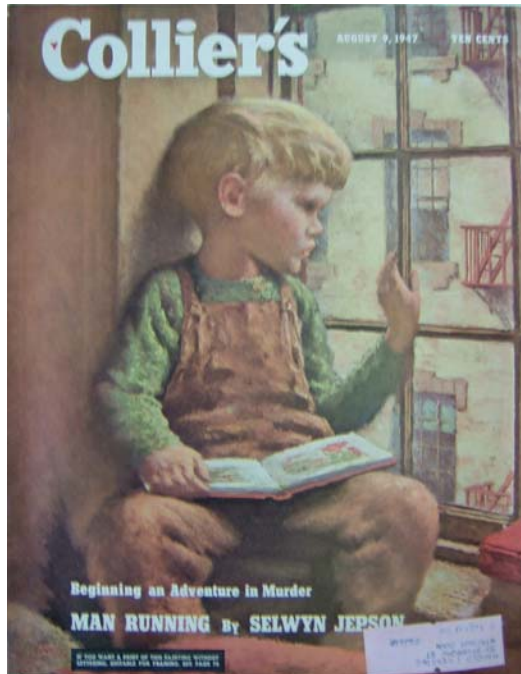
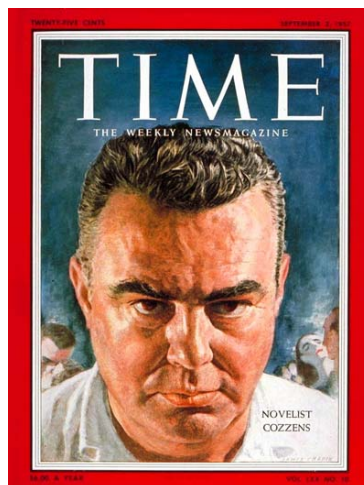
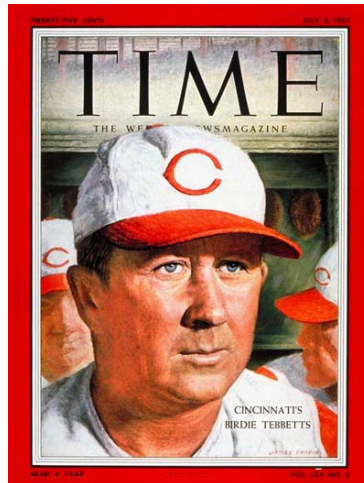


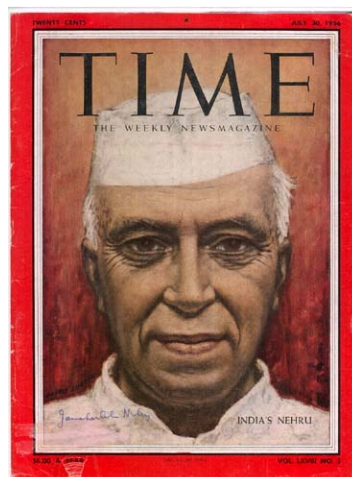
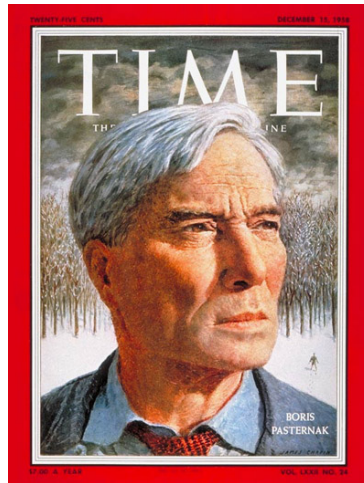
Fig. 6.17: James Chapin, *Boy at a Window*, Cover illustration for Collier's, August 9, 1947
Private Collection



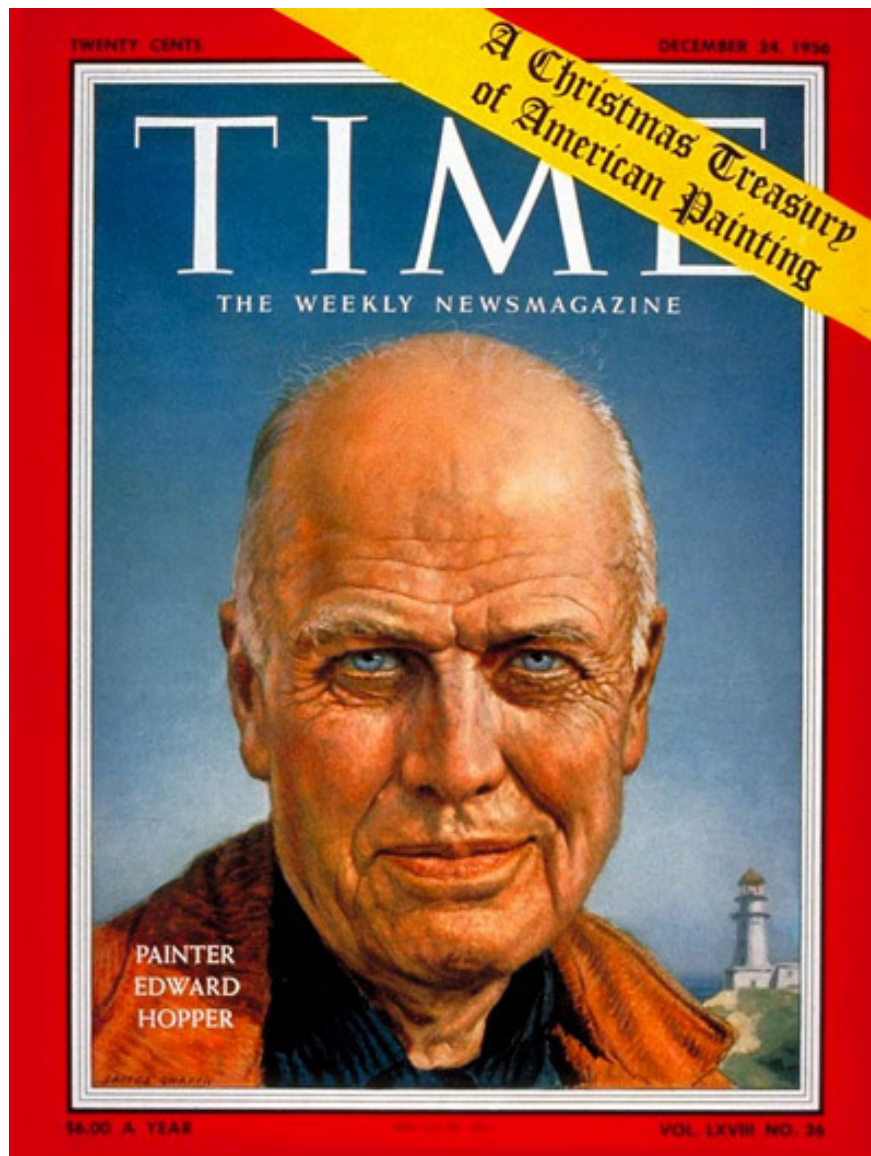
Fig. 6.18: Advertisement in Collier's for a lithograph of *Boy with a Book*, 1947
Private Collection



Figs. 6.19-21: James Chapin, Cover illustrations for Time
From the top: Willie Hartack (February 10, 1958), Birdie Tebbetts (July 8, 1957),
James Cozzens (September 2, 1957)



Figs. 6.22-24: James Chapin, Cover illustrations for Time
From the top: Boris Pasternak (December 15, 1958), Thurgood Marshall (September 20, 1958),
Jawaharlal Nehru (July 30, 1957)



Figs. 6.25: James Chapin, Edward Hopper, Cover illustration for Time December 24, 1956