



AMERICAN HOMESTEAD—WINTER

# AN EXHIBITION

*of original lithographs published by*

N. CURRIER and  
CURRIER & IVES



May 20 - June 15, 1968

Washington State  
Historical Society  
Tacoma

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## *The Printmakers*

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**N**ATHANIEL CURRIER was but twenty-two years old when in 1835 he published the first print under his own name. It showed part of the ruins left by a serious fire in New York City a few days earlier. Currier, noting the response of the public to a news picture which was produced promptly, followed that practice during most of his career. There was scarcely an event of any importance which did not find its way into a Currier print. Fires, ship disasters, Civil War engagements, death-bed scenes of famous persons, the spread of the railroads, the coming of steam, political battles, the advent of the Bloomer costume, woman suffrage and many other newsworthy affairs were illustrated.

He was shrewd enough however, to realize that there were other interests. Catering to the sentimentality of the period, he turned out many scenes of homelife. Courtship, marriage, children at play, religious subjects, wild-life, simple farm and village scenes sold in good volume. To catch the eye of the stay-at-home man who had to enjoy adventure and danger vicariously, he produced many hunting, prairie, and pioneering subjects. The dangers of the whale-fishery, Indians on the warpath, and sporting scenes provided hundreds of thrilling prints. Not overlooking the wide interest in horses and ships, many fine prints of these varieties were offered to the public. Later many political cartoons, some by the famous Nast, were produced. There were many humorous subjects of which the most popular was a series of "Darktown" comics mostly by Thomas Worth; one of these subjects is said to have sold to the extent of 73,000 copies.

James Merritt Ives who joined the firm in 1852 as a bookkeeper, became so valuable that he was made a partner in 1857. Thereafter, prints which previously bore the name of N. Currier, carried the new imprint, Currier & Ives. Prints, whether produced before or after the partnership, are commonly called Currier and Ives prints.

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## *The Prints*

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**C**URRIER AND IVES prints are what is commonly known as lithographs. Translated literally from the Greek, litho means stone; graph means writing or drawing. The illustration is drawn with a grease crayon on a special kind of soft, flat, porous stone. In printing, the stone is moistened with water, then inked with a grease ink. The ink adheres to the surface previously touched by the artist's crayon, but having no affinity for water, does not stick to the part of the stone where there is no drawing. A piece of paper pressed against the stone will then pick up some of the ink and retain an impression of the original drawing. The process can be repeated indefinitely. The impression on the paper is the reverse of the image on the stone, hence the necessity for the artist to draw the subject on the stone in reverse as if he were looking in a mirror. Most Currier and Ives prints were lithographed only in black. Colors were put on by hand.

The prints started at one end of a long table and one color was put on by each artist. When it reached the end of the table, it was complete.

Prints vary fractionally in size according to the surface available on the individual stone, but fall generally into three groups: small folio, approximately 8 x 13 inches; medium folio, 13 x 20 inches; large folio, 18 x 27 inches. The size refers to the printed illustration.

Some of the prints were sold directly from the shop in which they were produced. Dealers carried stocks of them. Many were peddled about the streets in push-carts. Small prints sold for fifteen, twenty or twenty-five cents; larger ones up to \$3.00 each. There was some justification for the higher proportionate price of large folios. They were better subjects, by the best artists, put on stone more carefully and with greater detail, the grain of the stone was finer, more colors were used and they were applied more carefully. These superiorities are reflected in the present prices.



## A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE PRINTS IN THIS EXHIBIT

### 1. THE BRUSH ON THE HOMESTRETCH *Currier & Ives—1869—Large Folio—24" x 30"*

The widespread interest in horse racing prompted the breeding of faster and even faster horses. Records were made only to be broken within a matter of months. This particular race was run at Prospect Park, Brooklyn on Saturday May 29, 1869. The fastest of the three heats was run in 2 minutes 21 seconds—within 1½ seconds of the record held by Flora Temple. The "premiums" were as follows: first, \$3,000; second, \$1,500; third, \$500.

### 2. CUTTER YACHT "MARIA" *N. Currier—1852—Large Folio*

Within a few generations America progressed from the pioneer stage to a point where there was both money and leisure to indulge in such sports as horse racing and yacht building. In making this print, Fanny Palmer probably had the advantage of working from the designer's model.

### 3. A FOUR-OARED SHELL RACE *Currier & Ives—1884—Large Folio*

This print shows the setting of the Great International University Boat Race, held on the river Thames, August 27th, 1869, between the picked crews of Harvard and Oxford Universities. The course was from Putney to Mortlake, a distance of 4 miles, 2 furlongs. Both shells were exactly 44 feet long and 21 inches wide. The Oxford crew, in blue, at a total of 780 pounds, outweighed Harvard by 42 pounds in spite of having a coxswain who weighed only 101 pounds. The word "Go" was given at 14 minutes past five o'clock. Harvard immediately took the lead which they kept for 2½ miles. At Chiswick Eyot they got into an eddy and were passed by Oxford who maintained the lead to the finish line, winning by a length and a half or, as contemporary reports gave it, "a half length clear water." The time was 22 minutes, 20⅞ seconds.

Two versions of this print have come to light. One, published in 1869, the year of the race, shows a typical English landscape along the river bank and gives some of the details of the race. The second version, which is reproduced herewith, omits the fact that Oxford won the race; a castle in the middle background has been removed and a row of poplar trees along the bank has been changed to less formal foliage. All other details remain identical and the illustration could almost pass for a race between Yale and Harvard on the Thames River in Connecticut.

### 4. HUNTING, FISHING AND FOREST SCENES *Currier & Ives—1867—Large Folio*

Probably done "on location" by one of the staff artists, several of whom were ardent sportsmen and spent their holidays in the Adirondack region.

### 5. MY COTTAGE HOME *Currier & Ives—1866—Large Folio*

Another scene from the skilled hand and trained eye of the versatile Fanny Palmer who is identified with more Currier & Ives prints than any other artist. This is one of a large group of sentimental or romantic subjects which were very popular in the middle of the nineteenth century.

### 6. SUMMER SHADES *Currier & Ives—1859—Large Folio*

It would be difficult to imagine a more peaceful summer idyll than this bucolic scene sketched by one of Currier & Ives staff artists.

### 7. THE SURPRISE *Currier & Ives—1858—Large Folio*

Skirmishes with the Indians were the basis for many of the exciting stories of the Wild West. Currier & Ives, who were quite alert to the public taste, published a number of fine prints showing trappers and prairie hunters in various engagements with unfriendly Indians. The scenes were quite dramatic and very well done considering that some of the artists had never been out West. The public, having had no more experience with the Indians than had the artists, found them quite convincing. "American Frontier Life—The Hunter's Strategem" was reproduced in the 1942 calendar; "Trappers on the Prairie—Peace or War?" in 1942; "Prairie Hunters—One rubbed out" in 1941.

### 8. "A BRUSH" ON THE SNOW *Currier & Ives—1871—Medium Folio—16" x 20"*

The possession of a fast horse or a fast team was a matter of pride. Chance meetings on the road often led to impromptu races of "a brush" as it was called. Such a scene must have impressed J. Cameron, who put it on stone for Currier & Ives to publish.

### 9. MILL RIVER SCENERY *Currier & Ives—no date—Medium Folio*

Undoubtedly sketched on the spot and later transferred to the stone by staff artist Fanny Flora Palmer. Since almost all of the large folio lithographs were copyrighted, it is interesting to speculate as to why no copyright line appears under this illustration. In a few cases, copyright was omitted when the subject obviously reproduced some well-known work of art, but such does not seem to be the case in this instance.

### 10. THE RIVERSIDE *Currier & Ives—no date—Medium Folio*

This pleasant and tranquil scene is attributed to Fanny Palmer. The versatile Mrs. Palmer is identified with more prints than is any other staff artist. She not only created many of the subjects but could, if necessary, also draw them directly on the lithographer's stone from which the impressions were made.

### 11. THE SLEIGH RACE *Currier & Ives—1859—Medium Folio*

Impromptu races must have been quite a common sight in winter and enjoyed both by the participants and the spectators. At least five variations of the subject have been recorded, of which this print is considered the best.

### 12. A SUMMER RAMBLE *Currier & Ives—no date—Medium Folio*

The artist who created this idyllic scene is not identified, but it bears a resemblance to other work known to have been done by Fanny Palmer, the most versatile of the members of Currier & Ives staff.

### 13. THE SUNSET TREE *Currier & Ives—no date—Medium Folio*

A sentimental subject illustrated by Fanny Palmer whose name appears on so many of the landscape and decorative prints. The title may have been suggested by a verse from the Tyrolean Evening Song written by Felicia D. Hemans (1794-1835)

"Come to the sunset tree!  
The day is past and done;  
The woodman's axe lies free,  
And the reaper's work is done."

### 14. BOUND DOWN THE RIVER *Currier & Ives—1870—Small Folio—10" x 14"*

The river was one of the main arteries for transporting goods to market. Boatmen could float their flat-boats down the Ohio and the Mississippi to New Orleans. On the way down they devised their own entertainment, playing musical instruments and singing to while away the days. On the return trip, it was more work than play.

### 15. EVENTIDE—THE CURFEW *Currier & Ives—no date—Small Folio*

This pastoral scene is reminiscent of an English countryside. It was undoubtedly produced to illustrate the well-known verse:

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
The Ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

### 16. THE FIRST RIDE *Currier & Ives—no date—Small Folio*

One of the many "sentimental" subjects produced by the famous lithographers, who were shrewd enough to publish such a variety of prints that at least some of them would appeal to any taste.

### 17. THE INGLESIDE WINTER *Currier & Ives—no date—Small Folio*

This family has made a project out of gathering faggots for the inglenook or fire. Ingleside literally means fireside.

### 18. THE LANDING OF COLUMBUS OCT'R 11TH 1492 *N. Currier—1846—Small Folio*

While Currier & Ives devoted most of their efforts to a pictorial reporting of contemporary happenings, they did publish a few prints relating to the major historical events (see "Landing of the Pilgrims" reproduced in the 1955 calendar). Christopher Columbus, born in Genoa about 1446, sailed under Spanish sponsorship on Friday August 2, 1492. At ten o'clock on the night of October 11, Columbus saw a light on what he assumed to be land. At two o'clock on Friday morning October 12, it was definitely determined that it was indeed a landing place.



## 19. LANDING OF THE PILGRIMS AT PLYMOUTH

11TH DEC. 1620

*N. Currier—no date—Small Folio*

A very early Currier print, published not much more than 200 years after the Pilgrims landed. In spite of the difficult voyage, they had even greater hardships ahead of them during the first winter in their adopted land. Those who survived held a Thanksgiving feast, a custom which is still observed in the United States, although sight is sometimes lost of its original significance.

## 20. THE SPERM WHALE "IN A FLURRY"

*N. Currier—1852—Small Folio*

The whaling scene used as the illustration for the March 1955 calendar showed the whalers "laying on." This was the term used when the whale-boat had approached the whale close enough for the harpooner to plunge the iron into his quarry. Then followed a period of one to several hours during which the boat was towed around by the stricken animal. The final and most exciting phase of the chase was the "flurry" in which the dying whale thrashed around, sometimes bumping a boat with his head or swamping it with water splashed by his enormous flukes.

## 21. THE WHALE FISHERY "LAYING ON"

*N. Currier—1852—Small Folio*

Intrepid American whalers pursued their quarry in all the oceans of the world. It was usually two to four years before the hold was filled with barrels of oil and stacks of whale-bone. In this illustration two whaleboats from the ship in the distance are racing toward a gigantic sperm whale. Attached to the harpoon is a long rope. If the harpooner succeeds in placing the iron, the crew will be towed on a "Nantucket Sleighride" for several hours until the exhausted whale can be approached and killed with lances. Then begins the long task of hauling it back to the ship, cutting it up and boiling out the oil.

## 22. WM. PENN'S TREATY WITH THE INDIANS

*N. Currier—no date—Small Folio*

This scene shows Penn at the historic meeting under the great elm tree at Shackamaxon at which time the "Great Treaty" was arranged with the Indians. It dealt with the purchase of lands and the regulation of trade. The colonists kept records of their agreements but the Indians kept only mental notes, which however, were exactly remembered and accurately handed down.

*The prints in this exhibition*

*are from the collection of*

*The Travelers Insurance Companies*

*Hartford, Connecticut*