

HENRY A. FERGUSON SKETCHES

OVERVIEW OF THE OBJECTS

Repository:	Crandall Public Library. Folklife Center Glens Falls, NY.
Creator:	Henry Augustus Ferguson (ca.1840 – 1911)
Title:	Henry A. Ferguson Sketches
Dates:	1864 - ?1890?
Quantity:	5 sketches (pencil on paper)
Identification:	Art and Artifacts: Art

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Henry Ferguson was born in Glens Falls about 1840. He was the son of Henry Ferguson and Rosanna Harris. He lived in Glens Falls until he was 18 or 20, after which he moved to Albany, living with his elder brother, Hiram, who was a well known wood engraver. He studied there with Homer Dodge Martin and George Henry Boughton . He is listed on his Civil War Draft Registration in Albany (1863) as a landscape painter. He subsequently moved to New York City and opened a studio, where he was patronized by some of the great names of New York finance: Astors, and Jessup, etc. He travelled widely in Mexico, South America and Europe, as well as Africa. After all this, he settled again in New York, where he lived until his death in 1911. In addition to painting, Ferguson was a noted art restorer. "His works of American scenery are very well known, the Berkshires, White Mountains, etc.....The labor and sacrifice entailed in procuring the subject of the picture for the Glens Falls Library can hardly be believed." (*Glens Falls Times*, 23 September 1931, in a piece written by Mrs. Elinor Ferguson, Henry's widow.) Although considered a member of the Hudson River school of painting he was equally famous for his exotic locales such as Cairo, Rome, and South America.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

There are 5 sketches. The first three depict the immediate aftermath of the fire in Glens Falls which occurred on May 31, 1864. The sketches were done on June 4 and 5 of 1864. Ferguson was living in Albany at the time, and came back to his boyhood home to see the damage. The other two depict the iconic covered bridge at Glens Falls, which stood from 1842 to 1890, also the subject of his painting, "Glens Falls, New York"(1882).

INDEX TERMS

Topics: Hudson River School
Artists
Covered Bridges

Places: Glens Falls, Warren, NY

Important People: Henry Augustus Ferguson

Form/Genre: Two Dimensional Non-Projected Graphic

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Preferred Citation: Henry A.Ferguson Sketches
Folklife Center
Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, NY.

Processing Information: Arranged and described by Erica Wolfe Burke, February 2018

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECTS

1.Glens Falls Fire of 1864 from the top of Glen Street Hill
A pencil sketch of a portion of the area burned by the fire of May 31, 1864. Length: 9 ¾" Width: 7 ¾"

At the upper right of the page:

"Glens Falls from the top of the hill on Glen St to the right"
"June 4, 1864
H. Ferguson"

At upper left of page is a numbered list of burned buildings, corresponding to numbers on the sketch:

- 1.Neumann's [Neumann's Hall]
- 2.Dan Peck Hardware
- 9.[]
- 6.Session house
- 5.Presbyterian Church
- 4.Fennell [Rev. A.J.]
- 10.Mrs. Rogers

For reference see the "Map of GF Destroyed by 1864 Fire" by A.W. Miller (Folklife map collections; framed copy on Folklife Center Wall; photocopy in Art binder).

2. Glens Falls Fire of 1864 from the back of Cowle's Store

A pencil sketch of a portion of the area burned by the fire of May 31, 1864. Length: 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " Width: 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Top of page handwritten in pencil:

1. Benedict's Stone House on Ridge Street
2. Ranger's homes where the fire stopt
3. Insurance building [Glens Falls Insurance Co.]
4. Mrs. Bill Peck Not burnt
5. Mrs. Martin's
6. Flack [A.W. Flack]
- 9/10 Hank Gayger's shop

Bottom of page: "Rear of Cowle's store looking towards [] house west

Henry Ferguson"

The date is presumed to be the same as the first or third sketch, June 4 or 5, 1864.

3. Glens Falls Fire of 1864 from back of Cheney's store

A pencil sketch of a portion of the area burned by the fire of May 31, 1864. Length: 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " Width: 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Estimated point of view is from Park Street facing the Mansion House ruins, from behind Cheney's stores, looking to the furthest left side of the fire (see map).

At upper right of page: "Sunday June 5, 1864"

"11 11 11 11" "New Shanties" [referring to new shanties put up by shops after the fire – less than a week before]

At upper left of page:

1. Fire first broke out [Glens Falls Hotel kitchen]
2. [W.S.] Carpenter's [Glens Falls Hotel]
5. Foundation of Mansion House
4. Charley Rice's [dry goods]
10. New Building on corner

At bottom of page: "view just back of Cheney's stores"

"Henry Ferguson"

4 and 5 The covered bridge at Glens Falls

There are two sketches, one is 7 ½ inches by 4 ½ inches on a paper 8 by 5 ¼ inches. It is a view of the Glens Falls covered bridge from downstream, looking up at the falls through the bridge. The Glens Falls bank of the river is on the right side of the river, the South Glens Falls on the left. The bridge and the island (site of Cooper's Cave) are in the middle. It has the appearance of a quick sketch. It is signed on the lower left border "Henry Ferguson." It bears a stylistic similarity to the "after the fire" sketches. There is a note on the back which says "sketch by the artist who painted the Bridge picture hanging in the office."

The second sketch is a much more detailed rendering, 12 inches by 7 ½ inches, on paper 13 ¾ by 9 ¾ inches. It is from the same point of view as the sketch above, and almost exactly the same composition. In this one the lattice on the bridge and the stones in the foundation are drawn with draftsman-like precision, but it is exactly the same scene. Below the picture "**GLENS FALLS**" has been inked in heavy capital letters. The sketch is not signed, but someone has written in pencil "by H. Ferguson." It does not look like Ferguson's handwriting, as evinced by his signatures on the other sketches.

The suggestion has been made that the smaller sketch was, in fact, a quick sketch done in situ (perhaps from a boat?), which was later developed into a finished drawing in the studio.

It is interesting to contemplate the relation of these un-dated pencil drawings to Ferguson's 1882 painting "Glens Falls, New York" (also in the collection of the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library). The painting shows the bridge, the falls, and the adjacent buildings, from the same point of view as the two sketches. However, some of the buildings appear to have changed position, or roof-line. Two evergreen trees have been added to the right foreground, obscuring much of the rocky shoreline and the two dead trees seen in the drawings. The depth of the foreground has increased and the several logs in the drawings have become a swarm, snaking down the river. The whole scene has been elongated somewhat horizontally, and the key line of the bridge and buildings is now more centered in the vertical space. The painting is signed "HENRY A. FERGUSON 1882."

Even with all these differences, it is tempting to think that the sketch, the more finished drawing, and the oil painting form a continuum, as the artist figured out what he wanted to do with this scene.

For more information about the artist see:

Folklife Center Vertical File "Ferguson."

Art & Artifact Files: Ferguson Folders

Books:

Czestochowski, Joseph S. American Landscape Tradition: A Study and Gallery of Paintings. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982.

Howat, John K. The Hudson River and its Painters. New York: Viking Press, 1972.

See also: CLP # 410 in the Crandall Library photograph collection for photographic images of the aftermath of the 1864 fire.

Bridging the Years, Glens Falls, New York 1763 – 1978 (Glens Falls: Glens Falls Historical Assoc. and Crandall Library 1978) pp.22-23, 26-27, 50 for images of the bridge and the falls.

Crandall Library photograph collection contains most of these and many others.