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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Publishes Thomas Cole's Journal, Never Before Available in Print

The Journal, Which Cole Entitled *Thoughts & Occurrences*, Exposes the Inner Workings and Private Thoughts of the Seminal American Artist and a New Window into Art, Politics, and Family Dynamics in 19th Century America

Catskill, NY – April 14, 2022 – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that it has transcribed and published Thomas Cole's private journal, making this primary source document available to the public for the first time. Cole (1801-1848) titled the journal, *Thoughts & Occurrences*, in which he wrote from 1834 until his sudden death in 1848. This period encompasses the peak of his artistic career, including the years when he painted his most iconic works: *The Oxbow*, 1836; *The Course of Empire*, 1836; and *The Voyage of Life*, 1842. Thomas Cole was an American artist and early environmentalist, an economic migrant from England, and the founder of this nation's first major art movement, now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. The text for the new publication was transcribed by Peter Fedoryk, a member of the 2019 Class of Cole Fellows at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, in consultation with Dr. Alan Wallach, Ralph H. Wark Professor Emeritus of Art and Art History & Professor of American Studies, The College of William & Mary, the leading Thomas Cole Scholar and member of the site's National Council.

Thoughts & Occurrences—published as a 129-page softcover volume—offers Cole's unique perspective as an economic immigrant who came to the United States from England at age 17, and who rose to become the most prominent landscape painter of the early 19th century and the inspiration for generations of artists that followed. Cole lived and worked in the significant, but often overlooked, period of social and political upheaval in America between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, when the young country was struggling with putting the constitution into action. Cole opines on emerging industries and technologies such as the railroad and Daguerreotype, exquisitely details hikes with family and friends in the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains, and records his harsh criticism for the Jacksonian government that defined much of his adulthood in the United States.

Regarding the politics of the Jacksonian Era, Cole worries: "I have of late felt a presentiment that the Institutions of the United States will ere long undergo a change, that there will be a separation of the States...every newspaper brings accounts of laws

violated...It appears to me that the moral principle of the nation is much lower than formerly...May my fears be foolish— a few years will tell.”

Regularly exploring the surrounding mountains for inspiration, Cole writes of excursions with Sarah Cole, the artist who was also his sister; Maria Bartow Cole, who married Thomas and whose family owned the property now known as the Thomas Cole National Historic Site; and many other historic figures. He writes of one such trip to the South Peak of the Catskills in 1836: “Standing on the topmost precipices and looking South East the View is sublime. The vast valley of the Hudson lies like a sea before and beneath you while the base of the mountain on which you stand rises abrupt...and seems like The Prow of a Stupendous vessel ploughing the Great Deep.”

The Journal concludes with Cole’s final entry, written on his 47th birthday, just ten days before his sudden death. He wrote a message of optimism: “Last night it snowed, and we are rejoiced to see the black, unsightly landscape covered with the pure mantle. The sun shines, and the heart rejoices in the change.”

“Thomas Cole’s own words tell his story through magnificent phrases and emotionally gripping anecdotes, and we are thrilled to bring this important text to the public,” said Betsy Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. “Cole’s journal is rife with experiences that shine a new light on our contemporary moment and how we’ve arrived here, as well as revelations of delight”

The book is the third installment in an ongoing publication series, an initiative of the Thomas Cole Site to transcribe and publish Thomas Cole’s original writing. The first two publications are Cole’s *Essay on American Scenery*, which underscores his role as a proto-environmentalist, and *Lecture on Art*, in which Cole makes the case for public art, the teaching of art, and the industrial arts.

All three books are available for purchase in the online store [here](#).

Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an international destination presenting the original home and studios of the artist and early environmentalist Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Cole founded the first major art movement of the United States, now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. Located on 6 acres in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House; Cole’s 1839 Old Studio; the reconstructed 1846 New Studio building; and gardens and grounds with panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains. It is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System. The Thomas Cole Site’s activities include guided and self-guided tours, special exhibitions of both 19th-century and contemporary art, print publications, lectures, extensive online programs, school programs, the Cole Fellowship, free community events, and innovative public programs such as the Hudson River School Art Trail—a map and website that enables people to visit the places in nature that Cole painted – and the Hudson River Skywalk – a scenic walkway connecting the Thomas Cole Site with Frederic Church’s Olana over the Hudson River.

The goal of all programs at the Thomas Cole Site is to enable visitors to find meaning and inspiration in Thomas Cole's life and work. The themes that Cole explored in his art and writings—such as landscape preservation and our conception of nature as a restorative power—are both historic and timely, providing the opportunity to connect to audiences with insights that are highly relevant to their own lives.

Visitor Information

The site is now open by appointment for private tours at thomascole.org/visit. The grounds are open every day for free from dawn to dusk. Keep in touch on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at [@thomascolesite](https://twitter.com/thomascolesite).