

THOMAS COLE

NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE



Thomas Cole's Voice Narrative in the Main House Parlor

All nature *here* is new to art.¹ The mists were resting in the valley of the Hudson— The tops of mountains were visible on the other side – you might imagine them in another world. The fields in shadow were a most beautiful fresh green, the mountain side was brilliant though dark.²

I am now in the village of Catskill with the intention of spending the Summer here. Retired from the noise and bustle of the city and surrounded by the beauties of Nature, I shall have every opportunity of improvement I can wish.³

I have just returned from the mountain, where I have spent two of the happiest days that I remember. Dark forests, rugged rocks, towering mountains encompassed me. It was sublime.⁴ I have found no natural scenery which has affected me so powerfully as that which I have seen in the wilderness of America.⁵ Yet I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away.⁶ The copper-hearted barbarians are cutting all the trees down in the beautiful valley on which I have looked so often with a loving eye. This throws quite a gloom over me.⁷ The ravages of the axe are daily increasing.⁸

I have been dwelling on several subjects and looking forward to the time when I can embody them on the canvas.⁹ My desire is to undertake a work on which I may hope to establish a lasting reputation. I will create a series of pictures that illustrate the history of a natural scene affected by man, wherein we see how nations have risen from the savage state, to that of power and glory, and then fallen again and become extinct.¹⁰ I have had some difficulty in finding an appropriate title for this series, but now I think I have a good one: The Course of Empire.¹¹ To my great surprise the series seems to give universal pleasure.¹²

What's more, I have found a congenial spirit to mingle soul with my soul.¹³ Since I have been married, my happiness is augmented.¹⁴ I often look at our house and think how wonderful that so much of happiness should be comprised in that little spot.¹⁵

I am as usual engaged in painting.¹⁶ Among American scenes, many a mountain, stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of the painter's pencil.¹⁷ But the wayside is becoming shade-less, and another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement.¹⁸

In this age, when a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, may we at times turn to the pure enjoyment of rural nature. We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly. Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it? ¹⁹

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- ¹ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 6, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- ² Thomas Cole, "Catskilliana," New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Notebooks, Box 8 Folder 2.
- ³ Thomas Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, July 6, 1826, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, CT, Manuscripts.
- ⁴ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 6, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- ⁵ Thomas Cole to Robert Gilmor, January 29, 1832, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Correspondence between Thomas Cole and Robert Gilmor 1826-1837, Box 3 Folder 8.
- ⁶ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- ⁷ Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, March 6, 1836, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 2.
- ⁸ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- ⁹ Thomas Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, February 9, 1844, quoted in Merritt, "A *Wild Scene*: Genesis of a Painting," in Rosenthal, et al., *Studies on Thomas Cole*, 19.
- ¹⁰ Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, September 18, 1833, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 1.
- ¹¹ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 28, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- ¹² Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry October 29, 1836, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- ¹³ Thomas Cole to Francis Alexander, September 1, 1834, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 1.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry May 14, 1837, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- ¹⁵ Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, undated letter from the Mountain House, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Cole Family Letters, Box 4 Folder 4.
- ¹⁶ Thomas Cole to William A. Adams, July 29, 1839, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 4.
- ¹⁷ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- ¹⁹ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.