

F. O. C. Darley Art Collection On View at Wilmington Library

E.E. 12/3/32

(By a Staff Writer.)

THE small collection of prints, drawings and etchings by Felix Octavius Carr Darley, on view in the main hall of the Wilmington Library, is attracting much interest, and may be regarded as offering further evidence of the outstanding eminence of Delaware painters and illustrators in the art world. Some of Mr. Darley's line drawings, cartoons and illustrations (the latter redrawn on wood by engravers, a process that often robs the original of much charm and feeling) are shown. The latter seem crude to laymen contrasted with the modern half tone pictures of the present day, but they doubtless represented the high water mark of illustrative art in the days when the public was still reading Dickens and Scott, Irving and Hawthorne and others of the New England group of writers.

Although a stranger to the present generation of readers and lovers of art, one can recall the high praise of the late Alfred Parsons, formerly art director of Harper's Magazine in the late seventies and early eighties, for the high merit of the Claymont artist's productions, an estimate confirmed by many of his contemporaries and recorded in biographical works.

I have always regretted that Wilmington had not a larger and more comprehensive collection of Darley's works, and that there were no color paintings in the group, but there is a canvas from his brush—perhaps two of them—owned in families of his former neighbors at Claymont, and perhaps these may eventually be added to the collection.

Mr. Darley made his home at Claymont for three decades or more, perhaps attracted by the beauty of the elevation overlooking a large expanse of country and the river, and possibly because of its proximity to Philadelphia and New York, the headquarters of publishers who drew upon him for illustrations and for other work, for he was indeed versatile, extremely so.

He was a familiar figure in his neighborhood and popular among his Claymont friends even though he was reserved in manner and possessed of a dignity that was more affected by professional men of earlier days than now. A portrait in the collection at the library recalls him, as I remember him, showing him wearing a black stock and coat with long tail, popular in the mid-period of the last century and which seemingly imparted to all men the appearance of having been cast in the same mould, and dressed by the same tailor.

Mr. Darley was tall, commanding and evidently fond of the children that romped and played about his home, which is still standing on the peak of the elevation of the village next to the original school house that became too small to accommodate the youth of the progressive community in its recent growth. Darley's home is not without its charm and

attractiveness, even today. It is different from its neighbors and still retains that inviting atmosphere that it must have always created. It is white and formed a beautiful background for the old-fashioned flowers that used to seemingly overflow the yard, so numerous and perfect was their development under the loving care of Mrs. Darley, formerly Miss Coulborn, who as a bride, in 1859 or 1860, just went there to live. She survived her husband, who passed on in 1888, by many years, her demise occurring during the World War period, or immediately subsequent, if I remember correctly. There are residents of Claymont who recall Mr. Darley and his wife proceeding churchward on Sunday mornings and the latter, I believe, sang in the choir at times.

The artist was tall and lean, but upright in bearing. A long military cape, to protect him against the cold of Winter, imparted a rather dramatic mien, to him, an inherent tendency, both of his parents being stage favorites of the era of his birth, which occurred in 1822.

I have often wondered if the name of Carr, which was the third of his four-sectioned cognomen, did not indicate that he was a kin or connection of the prominent Claymont family of the same name, the oldest perhaps of the community, unless it be the Lodges, whose title to their lands dates far back into the past, and who have given us one of the outstanding writers of modern fiction, who stands in the front rank of contemporary authors.

One cannot drop the brief story of Francis Octavius Carr Darley without noting that he was destined as a music teacher by his parents and his talent as a draughtsman was discovered by Thomas Dunn English, whose posthumous fame was established by the author of "Trilby," who reproduced his "Sweet Alice Ben Bolt" in that remarkable word picture of art student life in Paris.

Darley's first pictures to reach print were of sheep, and immediately his drawings were sought by Godey's Magazine and the Saturday Museum, both Philadelphia publications, and from then to the end of his days he was ever busy meeting the demands of publishers, and in drawing vignettes for our paper currency—a task in which he excelled above all his fellow craftsmen.

Mr. Darley's last important work illustrating Shakespeare, in 1886, commanded international interest in the world of art, but it is possible that the great Delaware artist will be best remembered by his picture "The Courtship of Miles Standish," which hung in the parlors of many American homes of that day and which are still treasured and yet displayed as family heirlooms and examples of early American art.

FELIX O. C. DARLEY

1822 - 1888

Felix O. C. Darley, noted American artist, was the son of John Darley, an English actor who emigrated to America about 1790. Felix was born in Philadelphia in 1822 and was one of a family of five children; all of whom gained success in one or other of the fine arts. As a small child Felix evinced a passion for drawing and although his father desired him to pursue a business career and secured a position as a clerk, for him in a mercantile house, when he was fourteen years old, art held him. Before he was twenty he was successful in having some of his sketches accepted and published by current magazines. From that time onward his work was very much in demand and during his lifetime he produced a remarkable volume of it; two series of drawings by him, each numbering five hundred.

He did some color work, consisting of a few portraits, certain pictures on order and a number of Civil war scenes, but it was as an illustrator that he was especially noted; being acclaimed the foremost artist in that field. Among the most important of the many series of illustrations to his credit, were those made for an edition of Cooper's novels, Scott's Waverly novels, editions of Shakespeare, Dickens, Irving, Cassings, "Our Country" and his own "Sketches Abroad with Pencil and Pen," which he published in 1868.

He became a Delawarean in 1859, when he and Mrs. Darley took up their abode at "Wren's Nest", near Claymont. This continued to be their home until his death there, in 1888.

Claymont April 23^d
Del. 1878.

Myrs Estes Lauriat

Gentlemen

I recd yours
of the 15th two or three days
ago. I am willing to
sell the copyright on my
"Kitchens Abroad" if you
will make me a liberal
offer for it. If you will
say what you will give
I will reply yours truly
F. J. Oakley-

Goodspeeds
Boston, Feb. 1850
\$

Chaymont March 17th
1868.

C. A. Plumus Esq

Dear Sir

I received
your letter of the 14th
yesterday and comply
with your request with
pleasure.

Yours Respectfully
J. O. Carney-

Carnegie Book Shop
N.Y.C., March 1968, \$7.50

Claymont Nov 4th
1868

C. B. Bance

My dear Sir,

Your suggestions
regard to subjects
the Almanac are
an improvement on
the first - which have
been used before.

I think they will
make a very pleasant
series of designs if
well treated.

Yours very truly
F. O. Bance

I am very much interested in another design
which I intend to send to you.

Goodspeeds, Boston
Oct. 1943, #2.76

Toebeary
11 Nov 4/61

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Claymont Oct 26.
1856.

Dear Sir,

Yours of the
20th only reached me last
night on my return from
Phila where I have been
staying for the last four
or five days. I presume
you are aware I have
no knowledge of color,
never having worked in
anything but india-ink
or sepia. The designs
spoken of by Mr. Heig
would have to be printed
in fresco on the walls
of the new rooms or in
distemper or varpentine

of which I have not
the slightest knowledge.
If Mr M wishes me
merely to make designs
in black and white to
be copied on the walls
by some artist in color
I will do so. but it will
be necessary before I can
give any idea of my
charges, to tell me the
exact size and character
or subject of each drawing.

Please enclose a copy
of this to Mr Meigs at
your earliest opportunity.
and oblige yours truly
J. P. Barber -

P.S. I wish you would
(when down town) call
on at Redfield's - 34 Park
man Street, and ask him
in my name, for a copy
of "Margaret" which will
be published early in
November - I want still
-man to write a notice
of it for the Crayon.

Ms. A. 9. 2. 1. 112

J. O. C. Darn
O. A. 26. 1875

#635

The unpublished European sketchbook of F. O. C. Darley

BY WILLIAM B. STEVENS JR., Curator, Wichita Art Museum

WHEN FELIX OCTAVIUS CARR DARLEY sailed for Europe in the spring of 1866, he was already one of America's most successful and popular illustrators: he had worked with such authors as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and even, early in his career, Edgar Allan Poe. An irrepressible draftsman, Darley drew throughout a fourteen-month trip, compiling in a series of notebooks a reserve of European scenes made in pen, pencil, and wash, which was to serve him for the next several years.

At least one of these sketchbooks has survived, and many of its forty-three drawings served as the basis for Darley's own travel book in an era rife with such books. His was entitled *Sketches Abroad with Pen and Pencil*, and the text was drawn largely from letters that he sent to his family during his travels; they describe and enhance the illustrations. Ultimately his sketches became detached from his text, perhaps because he drew far better than he wrote, perhaps because they could be made to serve other purposes. What is of particular interest is the disparity between Darley's original sketches and the illustrations that were made from them. By comparing the two, one can see the problems that faced all of America's nineteenth-century illustrators, even one as fully in control of his engravers' work as Darley was.

F. O. C. Darley (1822-1888) was an affable man, one

who enjoyed his profession, and who seems to have been destined for it from the start. After early successes in his native Philadelphia, he moved to New York in 1848, where he had the good fortune to work with Irving and Cooper; and the best possible wood engravers translated his energetic sketches into woodcuts. He became a life-long friend of Irving, and the illustrator's fame grew steadily, attracting the attention of the prestigious critic and author Henry T. Tuckerman, whose *Book of the Artists* was published in 1867, while Darley was in Europe.

Tuckerman notes that Darley did not visit Europe "until the maturity of his life and career" and therefore was not likely to be overwhelmed by the numerous foreign styles, but would hold steadfastly to his own. Indeed that was what happened; after twenty-four years of illustrating, Darley would not, and probably could not, have changed his rather romantic handling of landscapes or slightly exaggerated figure drawings simply because he was in Europe. Tuckerman, in his typical florid style, claims that Darley "will use much of these materials in large water-color compositions, and they will prove invaluable as means of elaborate and authentic illustrations of legend, chronicle, and song." In fact, they rarely went beyond small wood engravings and were first published in a newly created children's magazine called *The Riverside Magazine for Young People*, the year after Darley



Fig. 1. Studies for woodcuts of a monk and a Punch figure, by F. O. C. Darley (1822-1888). Unless otherwise noted, all illustrations are from Darley's European sketchbook (1866-1868) in a private collection.

returned from Europe. The editor of the new venture was Horace Elisha Scudder, who obtained pictures from such established artists as Winslow Homer, Thomas Nast, and F. O. C. Darley. The first of the full-length illustrated articles was called "Pictures from Switzerland," and it appeared in the November issue of 1868. It is a mixture of picturesque landscapes and figures, with a broad leavening of humor. The articles were stopped rather abruptly, but they had served their purpose as advance publicity for the forthcoming book published by Hurd and Houghton, *Sketches Abroad with Pen and Pencil*. It came out simultaneously in England and in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1868.

In the original sketchbook, on the same page as a study made of a Punch character in England, is a wryly amusing pair of drawings of a praying monk, done in Munich (Fig. 1). Darley writes of this figure, "At one of the altars we saw this priest who was making the most grotesque contortions of the face as he prayed without apparently uttering the slightest sound" (p. 63). The uppermost sketch was made first; in the lower one he improved on it and reduced it to the size of the cut that appears in the book. Darley's practiced hand, long accustomed to exploiting posture and gesture to the utmost in describing fictional characters, gives in the second drawing a marvelously expressive tilt to the jowly face of the monk. A shade anticlerical in intent, as indicated by his text, the work is at once amusing and sympathetic. As Tuckerman pointed out, Darley could seize the essence of a figure, although with his early training in humorous books (he illustrated the eighteen-volume *Library of Humorous American Works*, 1846-1849) he could also exaggerate for effect. The drawing of the monk was one of the few sketches from the European series to go into print essentially intact. This in itself was a tribute to Darley's mastery of his medium. Here he drew largely as an engraver would draw, avoiding soft washes that are difficult to re-create in wood engravings.

The Munich cathedral, where he saw the monk praying, was fertile ground for Darley, and he also found

there a peasant whose ingenuous ways attracted the eye of the illustrator. What in the original sketch (Fig. 2) is a forthright portrayal of respectful amazement becomes rather burlesqued in the cut as published. Frank Weitenkampf rightly noted in his *American Graphic Art* (New York, 1912) about Darley that "His characters always act their parts." There is the intentional exaggeration of the humorist here, but also a clear example of another trait observed by Weitenkampf: "His figures are solidly placed, seen in the round standing out with stereoscopic distinctness."

Darley was extraordinarily successful with scenes including several figures, as can be seen in the drawing of the farmer and his oxcart (Fig. 3), which he made in Switzerland but used at the end of the chapter on Munich. The sketch is artistically and compositionally



Fig. 2. In the Cathedral at Munich.



Fig. 3. Switzerland-/66.

stronger than the finished woodcut—first, because of the softness of the pencil; second, and more important, because the girl looks down rather prettily at the general scene. In the cut she is seen from the back and stares at her hands, thus removing the compositional device of having her glance return the viewer's eye to the rake and thence to the foreground figures.

Hardened as Darley probably was to the demands of diverse editors and publishers, it must nevertheless have been somewhat of a blow to have his lovely wash drawing of the Virgin of the Corn Market (Fig. 4) so roughly handled in the book. In the published version, it serves only as a decorative chapter heading, and the work is reduced to its barest bones (Fig. 5). In the original sketch one can see the retardatory romanticism of Darley, especially when drawing largely for his own pleasure.

On occasion Darley carried the development of the interaction of light and atmosphere well past the point at which it was still possible to duplicate the effect in woodcut. He was fond of doing independent landscapes in wash or water color—drawings that he never really expected to sell but would instead work up into larger pieces for entry in various academy exhibitions. Also, as his wife's diary for 1867 indicates, he spent hours sketching from hired models, apart from making his impromptu sketches of actual street scenes.

Sketches Abroad with Pen and Pencil proved popular

despite severe competition from the numerous other travel books of the period. It was reprinted in 1869 by Hurd and Houghton; again in 1878 by Estes and Lauriat; and finally, two years after Darley's death, in 1890, under the changed title of *Pen and Pencil Sketches in Europe*, again by Estes and Lauriat. In all these editions, the text and the illustrations are essentially the same; the changes are in omission rather than revision. Not all the illustrations in the published books have a precursor in this sketchbook, so very likely there are other books from the same trip which have not come to light. Darley, prudently, did not release all his sketches with the first edition of his book, and was therefore able to provide fresh material as demand arose.

Such was the case with a full-page wash drawing from the original notebook, a rendering of Lucerne Harbor (Fig. 6) which was first published in a series entitled "Fragments of Travel" in *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* for July 1871. It is one of the very few instances in which Darley's landscapes were allowed to appear essentially as they did in his original drawing, although, as always, the engraving loses something of the spirit of the sketch. This was also the first time these illustrations were used without his original text.

Unfortunately, Darley's delightfully spontaneous drawings in the book and the engraved versions were drifting further and further apart; the extreme was reached in 1889, a year after Darley's death, when Estes and Lauriat published a book entitled *American Artists and Their Works*, which included a number of Darley's drawings. A commemorative approach was used and for the first time the European sketches were mixed with wood engravings of his oils, other book illustrations, and water colors, with an eye to presenting a cross section of his work. But since Darley's own text—and sometimes the background scene as it appeared in the sketchbook—did not accompany the European drawings published in this book, there is a certain loss of freshness and atmosphere. Deprived of their original textual setting, the pictures, as they appear in *American Artists and Their*



Fig. 4. Heidelberg, showing the Virgin of the Corn Market.

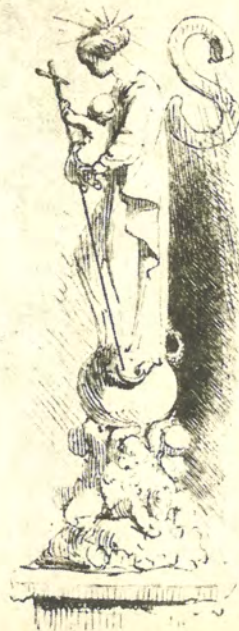


Fig. 5. Chapter heading from Darley's book *Sketches Abroad with Pen and Pencil*, engraved after the sketch in Fig. 4.

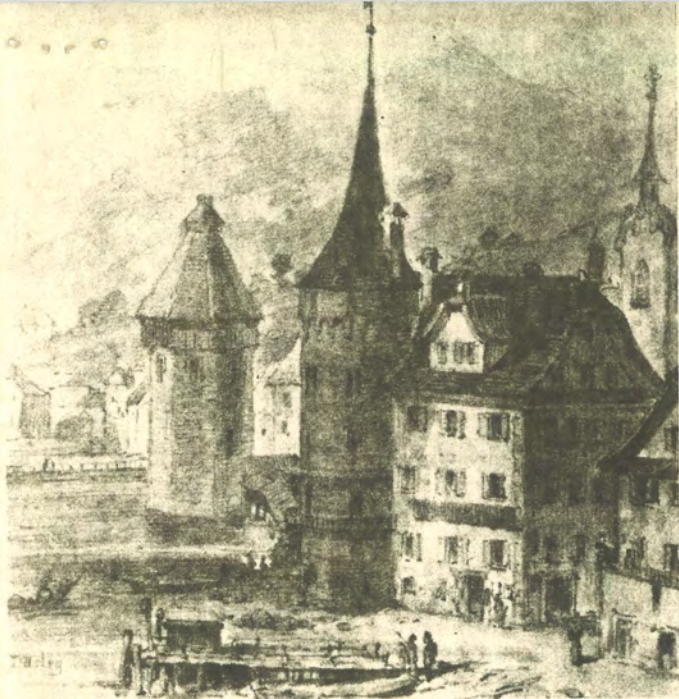


Fig. 6. Lucerne Harbor.

Works, become rather static. The amusing sketch of market women in Heidelberg (Fig. 8), for example, suffered seriously at the hands of the engraver.

In considering Darley's work it is perhaps best to recall that he was an illustrator, first and foremost. He was a master at setting down in pictorial form the written imagery of the authors of the nineteenth century, and the best of Darley's work was inspired by the creations of these writers. Yet once in his career he wrote his own text, and his own humorous and sympathetic view of Europe was revealed in all its spontaneity in the combination of his letters and the pages of his own sketchbook, which were not always adequately interpreted by his engravers in the published version.

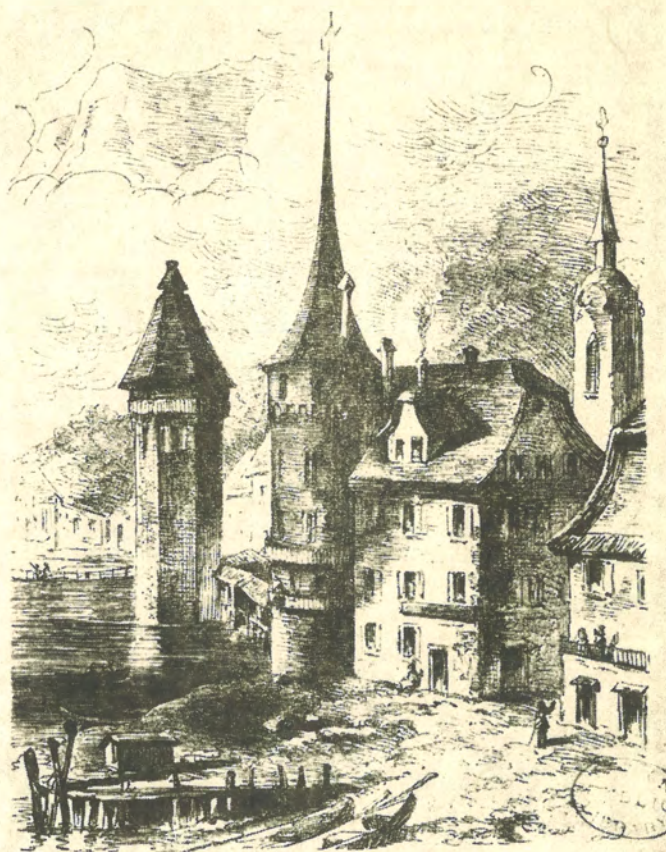


Fig. 7. Engraving by John S. Filmer of Darley's sketch of Lucerne Harbor, published in *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art* (Vol. VI, No. 122, July 1871).



Fig. 8. Heidelberg, Oct. 19th 1866.

56. *Standing Girl*
watercolor 23 x 12½



54. *Appeasing a Burning Thirst*, from 'The Deerslayer'
sepia wash 11½ x 12½



55. *Scene from The Pioneers*
sepia wash 15 x 10



47. HENRY FARRER
Windmill on Long Island [?]
watercolor 8¾ x 8½



48. HENRY FARRER
Rural Road
watercolor 18 x 12



49. HENRY FARRER
Marsh Land
watercolor 8 x 11



50. *Narragansett*
monochrome wash 10 x 14



51. *Battle between Indians, November 1859*
sepia ink 10¼ x 16¼



Felix Octavius Carr Darley (1822-1888)

52. *The Shoemaker's Shop*
ink wash 6 x 8¼



53. *Washington and Companions*
sepia ink 7¼ x 15¼



Felix Octavius Carr Darley was perhaps the best known draughtsman of the nineteenth century in America during a career that spanned some forty-five years. His first work was said to have been done for Edgar Allan Poe, when Poe was editor of *Graham's Magazine* in Philadelphia. (Although an examination of *Graham's Magazine's* illustrations during the time of Poe's editorship in 1841-42 shows little that Darley could have done with the exception of fashion plates. Poe may have simply aided Darley to find publishers for his work.) By the time Darley was twenty-one he had published a series of prints 'etched on stone' after his own drawings, entitled *Scenes of Indian Life*. Darley found the technique of 'etching' on stone very useful for reproducing his line drawings, and used it later in producing albums of line drawings illustrating Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and Judd's *Margaret*. In 1848, Darley moved to New York City to illustrate Washington Irving's works for the American Art Union. In succeeding years, he was prolific in producing not only illustrations for periodicals and books, in particular the works of Irving, Charles Dickens, and James Fenimore Cooper, but a great number of vignettes for banknotes and stock certificates for the banknote engraving firm of Toppan, Carpenter & Co. His illustrations ranged from satirical to romantic or historical. Darley's illustrations for *The California and Oregon Trail* by Francis Parkman were used in all reprints until they were replaced by the Remington drawings in the 1890's. In addition to this smaller work, done for reproduction, Darley also exhibited larger paintings at the National Academy of Design. A series of four lithographs, 'American Farm Scenes,' was published after his drawings about 1860. For whatever end he worked, Darley seems to have confined himself to working in either line, or monochrome wash, variously sepia, or black and white.

The extent of Darley's reputation as a draughtsman during his lifetime is clearly indicated by the following notice, published in 1866, dealing with American artists as draughtsmen. 'We have painters in profusion, but none of them can draw. Mr. F. O. C. Darley comprehends within himself the drawing genius of the country. He stands for that portion of American art to the world. He can draw the human figure in action or repose; can with the pencil express all the intermediate shades between these two extremes. All the rest are blunderers.'

Kennedy Galleries, Inc.
20 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022



“...illustrated by Darley”