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Elevating the Wood Engraved Landscape: The Work of Elbridge Kingsley

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ELEVATING THE WOOD ENGRAVED LANDSCAPE:
THE WORK OF ELBRIDGE KINGSELY

by

Elizabeth Siercks

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT
ELEVATING THE WOOD ENGRAVED LANDSCAPE:
THE WORK OF ELBRIDGE KINGSLEY

by

Elizabeth Siercks

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Kenneth Bendiner

This is a graduate thesis catalog exploring the work of 19th wood engraver Elbridge Kingsley. Kingsley's contemporary influences are traced using primary sources and visual analysis. Kingsley's stylistic tendencies, in both his original and interpretive engravings, are linked to other 19th century American artists. A brief discussion of the history of wood engraving and its technique are included as it relates to the evolution of Kingsley's style, as evidenced in his published work and his prints for collectors.

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-Elizabeth Powell-Siercks

Elbridge Kingsley and the Rise of Wood Engraving

The work of American wood engraver Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918) is largely unexplored despite his influential career as a wood engraver.

Credited with pioneering the “interpretive” wood engraving as well as creating engravings based on his own compositions, Kingsley attempted to elevate wood engraving from a commercial, craft process to a fine art. His landscape prints were praised for their originality both in composition and technique, though Kingsley was aware of already established landscape traditions in both Europe and America and these influences manifest themselves in his work.

Born in Carthage, Ohio on September 17, 1842, Kingsley grew up in the rural town of Hadley, Massachusetts, and a pastoral area that served as inspiration for his work.¹ Kingsley’s birth coincided with a decade of change and growth in the engraving industry. The May 1842, *Illustrated London News* was the first magazine to publish images alongside text.² Wood engraved images were ideal for this purpose because the blocks “were of a proper height to be used when a page was printed.”³ Kingsley noted that wood engraving had, “the advantage of being a quick process,” while etching is slow and cannot be printed with text, “making the production upon metal very rare and costly.”⁴

By the time Kingsley moved to New York in September 1863 to become an engraver, wood engraving workshops had become impersonal factories due

to “the increased pressure of deadlines,” such that specialization among engravers became necessary.⁵ Some engravers created the grass, others sky, while others executed subjects for the purpose of industrial advertising.⁶ The atmosphere of the engravers workshop “required engravers to follow a drawing exactly...the same way as other engravers,” so that each engraver’s line would match the others.⁷ Multiple engravers working on the same image led to “virtual craft anonymity.”⁸

It is from this environment of obscurity that Kingsley rose to acclaim during the last decades of the nineteenth century by producing his own wood engraved landscapes. The quality of his “original” wood engravings was made possible through dramatic technical changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Wood Cut versus Wood Engraving

After an apprenticeship at the Hampshire Gazette, Kingsley went to New York working first as typesetter at the New York Tribune under Horace Greely and then as an engraver for the J.W. Orr publishing house.⁹ Wood engraving was the primary means of illustration employed by publishers prior to and throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁰ To Kingsley the engraving room seemed the most reliable way to support himself while studying art, though his illusion of becoming an artist was nearly quelled by the industrial atmosphere of the engraving workshop.¹¹ In response to “the long room, like

a factory loft, with its cluttered presses, filled with the odor of tobacco and dust,” Kingsley sought new avenues of artistic expression.¹² Like most young engravers working in the nineteenth century, Kingsley specialized in what he called “mechanical” work.¹³ Kingsley described his time at the New York firm as promoting “a purely mechanical process,” from which he wanted “to get back into the woods and the wild places” he had known in childhood.¹⁴ He spent long hours in large rooms with other engravers copying the work of the firms’ draughtsmen. The ease with which wood engravings could be inset with movable type for mass printing made wood engraving an ideal means of producing detailed images alongside text.¹⁵ Most wood blocks were manufactured for the purposes of commercial publishing and were cut to the height of text in printing presses.¹⁶

Though woodcut had existed in Europe since the mid-twelfth century, wood engraving gained popularity in the late eighteenth century and reached its height during the last half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Both woodcut and wood engraving involve cutting images into wood for the purposes of printing on paper. Woodcuts can be created from any piece of wood and lines are made down-grain, using common carpenters tools like chisels and gouges.¹⁸ The woodcut was used to illustrate books throughout the nineteenth century but was gradually replaced by the wood engraving beginning in the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ English artist Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) created the first wood engravings, which were published in *A General History of*

Quadrupeds, in 1790.²⁰ His American counterpart, Dr. Alexander Anderson (1775-1870) first published engravings in the United States in *The Looking Glass of the Mind*, in 1794.²¹ Wood engravings, unlike woodcuts, are made from the densest woods, usually boxwood or fruitwood, and lines are created on the end grain using more specialized tools including burins, spit stickers, and a wide range of specially shaped gravers.²² Though both traditions share similar materials, they diverge distinctly in method. Wood engraving is a more sophisticated technique and its delicate lines soon eclipsed woodcut as the primary printing method for publishing.

Both woodcut and wood engraving are relief processes. Relief methods require very low pressure to print. The work of the wood engraver is defined by the marks that can be made by spit stickers, burins, and gravers. Wood engravers like Kingsley created compositions full of tone and depth using only stipples (dots), hash marks, crosshatching, and lines.

The New School versus The Old School

Despite the skill required to translate the image onto wood, engraving was thought of as a solely mechanical process, and engravers, including Kingsley, were referred to as craftsmen rather than artists. Kingsley and his contemporaries, known as “The New School of American Wood Engravers” changed engraving by incorporating new technologies, beginning in the 1870s. An 1878 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly*, illustrated by members of the

New School, marked the official abandonment of the earlier techniques advocated by Bewick.²³ By incorporating the photography-on-the-block technique, the New School was able to produce greater realistic detail by first transferring a photographic image onto the woodblock.²⁴ The process of transferring photographs onto woodblock to aid engraving evolved with photography. The first effort at photographic transfer is recorded in the 1839 issue of *The Magazine of Science*; the same year that pioneer photographer Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) unveiled his photographic negative.²⁵ In 1858, a dry collodion process showed more promise, and it was perfected for wide use by the 1860s when Kingsley started his career in New York.²⁶ By the 1870s the wood block could “be sensitized and printed upon through a negative, the same way as a ... photograph.”²⁷

The group of craftsmen who were known as “The Old School of American Wood Engravers,” led by William J. Linton (1791-1876), favored Bewick and Anderson’s original engraving techniques and tools. Linton likened the use of photography-on-the-block to “a slovenly sketch with an overabundance of discordant and meaningless tones and confusion of tints.”²⁸ Old School wood engravers sought to replicate the essence or idea of a work, rather than to create an exact copy. Yet, the Old School’s refusal to accept photography as part of the engraving process not only negated the innovative spirit which made wood engraving possible, but also ignored the fact that even a replicated copy, with the assistance of a transferred photograph, will

invariably involve some interpretation by the engraver.

The two schools differed both technically and stylistically. Old School wood engravings feature large areas of open white, and few areas of solid black, relying on “clear outlines to define...features,” whereas New School engravings feature greater variations of texture, and tone, leaving no open white spaces and few dark lines.²⁹ Reproductions of popular paintings, known as “interpretive” engravings, allowed artists’ work to be disseminated to a much larger audience. Elbridge Kingsley was particularly adept at replicating “the tonal veils of Inness and Ryder.”³⁰ Kingsley’s reproductions of these artists’ works benefitted, “hundreds of thousands in America whose “art life” fed upon reproductions.”³¹

The “interpretive” wood engravings made by Kingsley and the New School of engravers reproduced subtleties of texture by using the photography-on-the-block technique while leaving the overall character and tone of the work up to the engraver.³² Though the photography-on-the-block process created an opportunity for even greater precision in image replication, the New School sought other, less scientific ways to improve the quality of their prints. Kingsley used the photography-on-the-block technique, while working “with one eye on the painting itself,” or if the painting was not available, a photograph of the work.³³ Recognizing the limitations of replicating color works in a monochromatic medium, the New School often used rich tone and texture to produce mood and atmospheric

effects that the original artist may have generated through color. Kingsley and other wood engravers often established personal relationships with many of the artists whose work they reproduced. Kingsley, who engraved several of Albert Pinkham Ryder's (1847-1917) paintings, "watched him at work on *Jonah and the Whale*...and (he) marveled as he watched the changes in the picture from day to day."³⁴

By the 1880s, "interpretive wood engravings by Americans were widely acknowledged as the best in the world,"³⁵ which led to the 1882 formation of the Society of American Wood Engravers and the 1884 opening of the Grolier Club, an association for the appreciation of the graphic arts.³⁶ Both organizations gave American wood engravers like Kingsley a means of exhibiting their original art and selling it directly to collectors, instead of working solely for publishing houses. Free from the restrictions of the eight by five inch magazine format, Kingsley and his contemporaries could market portfolios of Japan proofs (prints in a large format on strong, tissue-thin paper, known as Japan paper, which was usually mounted with Arabic gum to a more rigid surface) to collectors of fine prints.³⁷ Kingsley was known for his exceptionally delicate wood engravings. Though nearsighted, Kingsley's work was so fine that one colleague even accused Kingsley of manipulating his proofs after printing to create the soft atmospheric effects.³⁸ Kingsley became so well known that John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) asked that he illustrate the 1886 edition of *Poems of Nature* for Houghton, Mifflin and

Co, a publishing house Kingsley had begun to do original work for in 1883.³⁹ Each poem was accompanied by an original Kingsley wood engraving, including *The Lakeside* (Cat. 12) and *The Sunset* (Cat. 16), both of which are featured in this exhibit.

Kingsley's technical expertise as an "interpretive" wood engraver also gained him commissions through various publishing houses to replicate the works of such noted American artists including George Inness (1825-1894), Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), as well as members of the French Barbizon School such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875). Most of these artists shared the same dealers Williams and Everett of New York and Cottier of New York.⁴⁰

Kingsley's Career

While working for J.W. Orr's New York publishing house, Kingsley took evening art classes at Cooper Union, but lamented that "there was no encouragement for the artistic picture" in the engraving room.⁴¹ Despite his negative environs, Kingsley's works were well received and were printed in many leading publications, including *Godey's Ladies Journal*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and *The Century Magazine*.



1. Elbridge Kingsley
Portrait by W. Kurtz
Photography,
Madison Square, New
York, The Perry G.
Vienot Collection

Kingsley was inspired by British artist Philip Gilbert Hamerton's (1834-1894) memoir, *A Painter's Camp in the Highlands*, a work which encouraged artists to experience nature first hand by spending days and nights outdoors.⁴² However, Philip Gilbert Hamerton suggested that "creating engravings in the outdoors was "too difficult an undertaking ...because of the patience required."⁴³ Despite this, in September 1879, Kingsley "shook the pillars of tradition by appearing with an engravings direct from nature made in a sketching car."⁴⁴ Fellow engraver Frank French (1850-1933) credited Kingsley with the invention of the "camping car," with its "snug and well-contrived accommodations for painting and for wood engraving."⁴⁵ From his wagon, Kingsley made preparatory sketches and photographs of the landscape and created wood engravings from nature engraved directly onto the block (and in some instances sketched onto the block first.) Yet, two decades before Kingsley constructed his studio and camping vehicle, the British photographer Roger Fenton (1819-1869) had created a wagon in which to travel during the Crimean war of 1855.⁴⁶ During the American Civil War the daguerreotypist turned war photographer Matthew Brady (1822-1896) also worked and traveled in his own darkroom, known to the soldiers as the "what-is-it" wagon.⁴⁷ Like Brady and Fenton's cars, Kingsley's "gypsy" wagon was not just equipped for camping but was also a functioning dark room.⁴⁸

View in New England Woods (Cat. 20), featured in this exhibition, was

created by Kingsley while camping in his “gypsy” wagon. *View in New England Woods* is engraved directly onto the block, whereas Kingsley’s *Jersey Swamp* was first drawn on the block then engraved.⁴⁹ Other works were created from photographs. Kingsley’s innovative techniques were in keeping with the modernity of the New School of American Wood Engravers, but his subject matter often nostalgic.

Kingsley’s unique conveyance added to the novelty of his work. Many contemporary



2. Kingsley’s sketching car, photograph by Elbridge Kingsley, The Perry G. Vienot Collection.



3. Elbridge Kingsley, *View in New England Woods*, c. 1882, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection

publications remarked on Kingsley’s gypsy wagon one writer calling it “an ingenious jaunting car fitted up with every convenience for photography, sketching, painting, combined with sleeping and housekeeping conveniences...perfect for bachelor comfort.”⁵⁰

In the 1870s, interest in French Barbizon paintings had increased and engraved versions of had increased and engraved versions of these works made them more accessible both to publishers and collectors.⁵¹ Corot was in fact one of the most forged and imitated painters of his day, and his popularity was so great in America that it was suggested

that “Corot painted a 1,000 pictures, 1,500 of which were in America.”⁵²

Many artists of the popular French Barbizon School also worked in the outdoors, and having replicated paintings by Corot (1796-1875) and Charles-Francois Daubigny (1817-1878), Kingsley’s plein air work may have been inspired by these artists.⁵³

A master of reproductions of fine art, Kingsley’s original compositions were his most celebrated works. *View in New England Woods*, featured in this exhibition, was the first of Kingsley’s original compositions to be published. Presented in the November 1882 issue of *The Century Magazine*, the image accompanied an article written by Kingsley.⁵⁴ Throughout the 1880s Kingsley produced a prodigious amount of original engravings, both for collectors and for general publication. Kingsley’s 1882 article for *The Century Magazine* describes his unique process of “camping alone in a new England wood (in) a car fitted with every convenience for painting in oils, engraving on wood, and photographing whatever appealed to the fancy.”⁵⁵ For *View in New England Woods*, Kingsley engraved directly onto the block with a single graver.⁵⁶ at the height of his career Kingsley had “acquired a reputation for engraving directly from nature without the intervention of brush or pencil.”⁵⁷ Kingsley mentioned his use of photography but was quick to add that, “nothing as a whole was photographed.”⁵⁸ A large collection of landscape photographs made by Kingsley suggests that some preparatory studies may have been done with the camera, yet his statement that “nothing as a whole

was photographed,” is likely valid. Kingsley’s final compositions are interpretations of the landscape, whether sketched, photographed, or engraved directly onto the block. Kingsley preferred engraving because it evoked feeling, and suggested that if you “want all the form you can see, then you should get a photographer.”⁵⁹

Kingsley’s 1882 article in *The Century Magazine* provides better insight into the distinct physical methods used when engraving in the outdoors, but it also illuminates the precarious relationship between photography and wood engraving. Wood engraving had become reliant on photography in the late nineteenth century but experiments were already underway to replicate photographs alongside text, thereby eliminating the engraver.⁶⁰ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, who had become an admirer of Kingsley’s work, and “in 1894 published a text to accompany forty hand-printed proofs for *The Art of the American Wood Engraver*,” in which he lamented that process could not be a substitute for wood engravings.⁶¹

Many publications praised Kingsley’s work including the January 1886 issue of *The New England Magazine*, which featured an entire article on Kingsley and his process. Though Kingsley was generally respected and seen as an innovator, not all were approving of Kingsley’s methods or engravings. In the November 28, 1885 edition of *The Critic* magazine, Kingsley’s assertion that he engraved “in nature” was questioned and it was said that he filled his images with “incoherent detail.”⁶² Nonetheless, the

1893 Columbian Exposition featured over a dozen of Kingsley's prints in the Art Building, alongside work by other New School engravers, including six of his own compositions.⁶³ *The Flying Dutchman* after Ryder (Cat. 7), *Journey Northward* (Cat. 11) and *A Winter Evening* after Tryon (Cat. 22) were among those prints featured at the Exposition and are presented in this exhibition as examples of both Kingsley's interpretive and original work.⁶⁴

Kingsley's original wood engravings were attempts to elevate wood engraving to the level of American landscape painting, a motive that was for him both artistically and economically rewarding. Ten of Kingsley's engravings appeared in the first print room of the American Society of Wood Engravers at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle including *In the Harbor* (Cat. 9), *The Flying Dutchman*, and *White Birches* (Cat. 21), all of which can be seen in this exhibition.⁶⁵

White Birches, one of Kingsley's very first original landscape engravings, won the only gold medal for engraving at the 1889 Paris Exhibition Universelle and went on to tour both internationally and domestically.⁶⁶



4. Elbridge Kingsley, *The Flying Dutchman*, c. 1889, after Albert Pinkham Albert Ryder, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection



5. Elbridge Kingsley, *White Birches*, n.d., Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection

Through the Grolier Club's traveling exhibitions Kingsley's work also exhibited in many major American cities during the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷

Influences

Kingsley's original engravings were novel and incorporated some unusual compositional choices; yet these engravings are consistent with American landscape traditions established in American painting in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Landscape, an extremely popular theme in nineteenth century America and Europe, was painted by American artists Thomas Cole (1801-1848), Frederic Church (1826-1900), George Inness (1825-1894), Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), Dwight William Tryon (1849-1925) and Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), all of whose work Kingsley was aware of, through personal and professional relationships. In his autobiography Kingsley's describes his relationship with George Inness, who introduced him to the Barbizon School, his relationship with Albert Pinkham Ryder, and his encounter with the epic landscape painters Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt at public art exhibits in New York. Kingsley was also influenced by Hudson River School artists Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) and Thomas Cole, and the earlier British artist J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851).

The atmospheric effects seen in works such as Kingsley's *In the Harbor* (Cat. 9) and his *At Sea* (Cat. 1) are reminiscent of the approach of English

landscapist J.M.W. Turner. Kingsley's *At Sea* shares the same visual drama and controlled chaos of Turner's *Slave Ship* (1840, Museum of Fine Arts Boston). In an article in *The Printing Art* of 1918, George Howes Whittle implies that "the mystery of the great waters must have attracted Kingsley in like measure as with the elemental woods as he listened to the never-ceasing beating of the waves so like the murmuring of the wind-stirred trees."⁶⁸

Kingsley's upbringing in a coastal state, his love of nature, and his aptitude at rendering texture and tone would suggest a natural inclination towards sea themes; it is also probable that Kingsley was influenced by popular taste and by artists like



7. J.W.M. Turner, *Slave Ship*, 1840,
Oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts
Boston

Turner.

Turner's stormy

seascapes

reproduced in

popular prints were undoubtedly

familiar to Kingsley.



6. Elbridge Kingsley, *At Sea*,
c. 1883, Wood engraving,
The Perry G. Vienot
Collection

Though Turner died in 1851, his *Slave Ship* was exhibited in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1873, 1874, and 1876, and Turner's work experienced a rise in popularity beginning in the 1870s after the publication of several Turner biographies.⁶⁹

Kingsley had an enduring friendship with the renown American

landscape artist George Inness who began his career as a map engraver.⁷⁰ Kingsley replicated many of Inness' paintings throughout the 1880s and 1890s, and Kingsley's *The Sunset* (Cat. 16), featured in this exhibition and published in the 1886 volume of Whittier's *Poems of Nature*, is possibly his most Inness-like engraving. Departing from his usual subject matter, Kingsley's *The Sunset* focuses on two lone figures with their backs to the viewer, who overlook a sizable body of water. Inness' painting *Lake Nemi* (1872, Museum of Fine Arts Boston) shows a single figure turned away from the viewer looking over the grand vista of *Lake Nemi*. Though Kingsley never replicated Inness' *Lake Nemi* the similarities in composition and subject of both works are striking and conjure feelings of human insignificance in the vast quietude of nature. It is likely that Kingsley saw this painting. It was popular with European painters and Kingsley had



8. Elbridge Kingsley, *The Sunset*, c. 1886, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection



9. George Inness, *Lake Nemi*, 1872, Oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

replicated Corot's *Lake Nemi*, (1843, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere), though Corot's composition is without figures and his approach to the lake is

more accessible.

It is well documented that Kingsley had a relationship with the often-misunderstood American painter Albert Pinkham Ryder. Ryder, like Kingsley, was seen as being “little influenced by the world around him or the art of others.”⁷¹ Ryder and Kingsley were natives of Massachusetts and both men were praised in *The Century Magazine* for their creativity.⁷² An article about Ryder, which appeared in *The Century Magazine* in 1890, was illustrated with engravings by Kingsley.⁷³

While Ryder created some landscapes, he is most famous for his allegorical paintings, and was deeply interested in Richard Wagner (1813-1883), Norse and Greek mythology, and Christian iconography.⁷⁴ Despite the dissimilarity of subject, Kingsley’s original works share many of Ryder’s atmospheric affects. While watching Ryder paint, Kingsley noted that Ryder would apply a light glaze which was heavily over painted, a technique known as scumbling.⁷⁵ The atmospheric effects created by scumbling and glaze are replicated in line by Kingsley and are particularly apparent in Kingsley’s original work, *The Celestial City* (Cat. 5). *The Celestial City* is a mythic metropolis with Viking



10. Elbridge Kingsley, *The Celestial City*, C. 1884, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection

proclivities as evidenced by the longboats, in keeping with Ryder's preference for Wagner and Norse legend.

Although in Kingsley's engraving human activity is minimal, evidenced only by the small Viking boats, figures are the focus of most of Ryder's canvases. Yet Kingsley's *Celestial City* is reminiscent of Ryder's work in its tone and atmospheric effects. As Kingsley himself noted, "the main points of interest (in Ryder's work) move all over the canvas, according to the stimulating influences of color."⁷⁶ Kingsley replicated this color in tones of black and white. Ryder's New York art dealers, Cottier and Williams and Everett, also promoted the work of French Barbizon artists including Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867), Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875), and Jules Dupre (1811-1889).⁷⁷ It is likely that through Ryder's dealers Kingsley was exposed to the Barbizon school.

Kingsley produced engravings after works by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Georges Michel (1763-1843), Charles-Francois Daubigny (1817-1878) and other French Barbizon artists. Decades before Kingsley ventured into the New England wilderness in his sketching car, members of the loosely affiliated Barbizon school were painting cows and trees and forest glens out of doors in France.⁷⁸ Corot and Millet, like American artists Inness, Church, and Bierstadt, often incorporated figures in their landscapes. Corot and Daubigny painted rural scenes that included cow herders and their flocks. Though their means of transport differ, the desire to travel in nature spanned

decades and crossed continents.

Kingsley was especially adept at translating the muted browns and greens of the work of the Barbizon artists in his reproductions by compensating with subdued tonal effects while retaining minute detail.⁷⁹ When replicating Corot's



11. Elbridge Kingsley, *Forest at Fontainebleau*, n.d., after J.B.C. Corot, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection

Forest at Fontainebleau (1846, Museum of Fine Arts Boston), a painting which is

over four by three feet, Kingsley retained all the fine texture and translated in black and white the uniform color of the work. This is a particularly astounding feat considering that Kingsley's *Forest at Fontainebleau* (Cat. 8) is only four by three inches so it could be published in an article about Corot in *The Century Magazine*.⁸⁰

In his autobiography Kingsley recalled how much Albert Bierstadt's paintings impressed him when he viewed them at a Broadway gallery in the early 1860s.⁸¹ It was at this same time that he also saw Frederic Church's *Heart of the Andes* (1859, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Church's *Niagara Falls* (1857, Corcoran Gallery of Art) and Thomas Cole's *Voyage of Life* (1842, National Gallery of Art), which were all exhibited at various Sanitary fairs, charity events held to raise money for the Union cause.⁸² That Kingsley recalled these specific works decades later when writing his memoir

indicates their impact. Kingsley had reproduced famous landscapes during his career, on a scale suitable for publishing, including Inness' *Niagara* (1884, Museum of Fine Arts Boston), a favorite subject with American landscape painters (Cat. 2).

Kingsley preferred the wilderness of New England. Rarely threatening, Kingsley's landscapes invite the viewer into patches of forest and areas of woods, much like Barbizon landscapes, but Kingsley's work seldom includes



12. Elbridge Kingsley, *Blue Niagara*, c.1885, after George Inness, Wood engraving, The Perry G. Vienot Collection

signs of human intrusion, whether figural or architectural. Kingsley's engravings, always executed on a much smaller scale than traditional landscape, are a celebration of the simple, rather than an amplification of the epic or the sublime.

As landscape artists, Church, Bierstadt, and Kingsley depicted different areas of the United States. Bierstadt's paintings glorify the Western frontier, while Church's landscapes exoticize nature. Church's occasional inclusion of small figures is meant to increase the grand scale of their natural surroundings, while Bierstadt's native figures in his Western landscapes create an untamed atmosphere combined with ethnographic study. Kingsley's work, which intended to capture the stillness of the New

England woods rarely included figures.

While Church and Bierstadt depicted the specific and the iconic, Kingsley engraved the anonymous. Kingsley emphasizes quietude rather than the majesty of his environment. Most of Kingsley's works have vague titles such as *Morning*, *The Sunset* (Cat. 16), and *Springtime* (Cat. 15), all of which allow the audience to imagine a scene of general rather than definite origin.

Kingsley's work is as much a product of the contemporary art scene, as it is his own artistic inclinations. Kingsley's original works show an amalgam of stylistic choices found in contemporary landscape tradition, along with his own distinctive subjective and compositional choices. Working in a medium that by its very nature prohibits the use of color, Kingsley created interest through texture rather than color. In his *The Lakeside* (Cat. 12), an image illustrating in Whittier's *Poems on Nature* (Cat. 26), Kingsley's nuanced shading and definitive line enhance the visual reality of water, pines, rocky ground, storm clouds, and delicate birch leaves in the absence of color. The viewer's eye is drawn out of the heavily shaded areas at the bottom left to the lightest areas in the upper right. The low ground line, typical in Kingsley's compositions, places the viewer in the foreground of the work and offers intimacy with the scene while the depth of field creates a sense of expansiveness despite the small scale of the image. Many of Inness' compositions, such as *Early Autumn in Montclair* (1891, Delaware Art

Museum) treat the viewer in the same way, as an integral but unseen part of the setting, though Inness' works usually include human figures. This intimacy and contact with the scene is in direct opposition to the work of the Hudson River School. Kingsley was certainly aware of Hudson River School artists like Thomas Cole and his student Frederic Church, whose viewers are placed omnipitantly out and above sublime scenes of nature; Kingsley preferred the Barbizon method of an intimate view of nature.

Kingsley favored the rustic woodland landscape that visually ignored the presence of humans, or hints at their existence with only the subtlest of clues: a bridge, a boat, a dwelling, or obscured lights on the horizon possibly from a lantern.

Decline

By the 1890s photography displaced wood engraving as the “practical” reproductive process for placing images alongside text. The half-tone method, a cheap and easy means of reproducing photographs along with type, came to prominence in the 1880s.⁸³ Patented in 1882, it became widely used by 1890 and within ten years, only a few wood engravers had any work through publishing firms. Kingsley was “technologically unemployed by 1896.”⁸⁴ Decades earlier the photography-on-the-block technique, embraced so enthusiastically by the New School, had replaced the draughtsmen, who were responsible for composing and transferring line drawings onto the block

for engravers.⁸⁵ Now at the end of the nineteenth century, it was “a photographic process had begun the revolution of the New School of Engraving and a photographic process ended it.”⁸⁶ In 1892 some considered Kingsley “to be the foremost artist of his day,” and a group of women in the Sacramento Valley, led by Ms. Cecelia Crocker Simmons (1842-1923) started the Kingsley Art Club, dedicated to the appreciation and collection of his work.⁸⁷ Only one year after receiving another gold medal, at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Kingsley withdrew to Massachusetts.⁸⁸ His career as an engraver was over, though he left behind some three hundred blocks.⁸⁹ He spent his later years experimenting with photography and half-tone engraving.⁹⁰

Eventually Kingsley resigned himself to creating half-tone process blocks from other photographer’s work.⁹¹ In a speech given by Kingsley at the Grolier club in 1916, he remarked that “if the nightmare of the process plate [had held] off ten years longer, and if the whole publishing world in a race for supremacy, did not commercialize the whole art in question [engraving], ...how much might [have been] done in America.”⁹² Though Kingsley’s speech mourns the intrusion of photography, his career would not have been possible without it. Kingsley passed away in Brooklyn on August 28, 1918.⁹³

Both wood engraving and photography were media on the periphery of “fine” art. The wood engraver was often referred to as a “craftsman” more

than he was as an “artist.” The reproductive and repeatable potential of both media suggest that Kingsley’s idea to draw from nature was an attempt to aesthetically elevate these two commercial “craft media” to those of more autonomous art forms. A master of his craft and a true landscape artist, Kingsley’s career occupied an exceptional time in the history of American graphic arts. Kingsley’s obscurity can be attributed both to the commerciality of the medium of wood engraving and the sudden decline of wood engraving due to technological advances, but his connection to the larger tradition of nineteenth-century landscape is obvious.

END NOTES

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26. Jussim, *Visual Communication*, 85; and Beegan, 268.
27. Kingsley, *On Wood Engraving*, 2.
28. Beegan, 269
29. Ibid, 259
30. Larkin, 253.
31. Ibid, 252.
32. Brandt, 10.
33. Larkin, 254.

34. Ibid, 270.
35. Brandt, 1.
36. Ibid, 21; and Elbridge Kingsley, *Catalogue of the Work of Elbridge Kingsley*, Compiled and Arranged for Mount Holyoke College, 1901, 13-14.
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38. Kingsley, *The Life and Works*, 145.
39. Ibid, 181.
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44. A.V.S. Anthony and Timothy Cole and Elbridge Kingsley. *Wood Engraving: Three Essays by Three Engravers*, (New York: The Grolier's Club, 1916), 43; and Kingsley, *Catalogue*, 13.
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75. Larkin, 270.
76. Ibid, 270.
77. Evans, 24.
78. Bazarov, 127.
79. Jussim, *The Eternal Moment*, 30.
80. Ibid, 30.
81. Kingsley, *The Life and Works*, 31.
82. Ibid, 31.
83. Brandt, 15.
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APPENDIX: EXHIBITON CHECKLIST

Prints and Wood Blocks

All Works by Elbridge Kingsley

1. *At Sea*, c. 1883
Wood engraving on Japan paper
8 x 5 1/4 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
2. *Blue Niagara*, c. 1885
After George Inness (American, 1825-1894)
Wood engraving in color
5 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
3. *Blue Niagara*, c. 1885
Wood block
5 1/2 x 7 3/4 x 1 inch
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
4. *The Burial Ground*, c. 1886
Wood engraving on Japan paper
6 x 5 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection.
5. *The Celestial City*, c. 1884
Wood engraving
7 x 4 3/4 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
6. *Dinner in the Steerage*, c. 1877
Wood block
4 1/2 x 6 1/4 x 1 inch
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
7. *The Flying Dutchman*, c. 1889
After Albert Pinkham Ryder (American, 1847-1917)
Wood engraving
8 3/4 x 10 1/2 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection

8. *Forest at Fontainebleau*, n.d.
After Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (French, 1796-1875)
Wood engraving
3 1/2 x 5 3/8 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
9. *In the Harbor*, c. 1889
Wood engraving on Japan paper
16 7/8 by 11 7/8 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
10. *In the Pines*, c. 1886
Wood engraving
3 1/2 x 5 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
11. *Journey Northward*, n.d.
Wood engraving on Japan paper
7 9/16 x 9 3/4 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
12. *The Lakeside*, c. 1886
Wood engraving
6 x 5 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
13. *Moonrise at Sunset*, c. 1887
After Dwight William Tryon (American, 1849-1925)
Wood engraving on Japan paper
9 x 14 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
14. *Old Hadley Street*, c. 1889
Wood engraving
4 x 5 1/8 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
15. *Springtime*, 1892
After Dwight William Tryon (American, 1849-1925)
Wood engraving on Japan paper
6 5/8 x 14 3/4 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection

16. *The Sunset*, c. 1886
 Wood engraving
 5 1/2 x 7 5/8 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

17. *Tragedy of a Nest*, c. 1883
 Wood engraving
 7 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

18. *Under the Elms*, n.d.
 Wood engraving on Japan paper
 8 7/8 x 13 inches
20. *View in New England Woods*, c. 1882
 Wood engraving
 8 x 5 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

19. *View in New England Woods*, c. 1882
 Wood engraving
 8 x 5 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

20. *White Birches*, n.d.
 Wood engraving
 4 15/16 x 7 3/8 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

21. *Winter Evening*, n.d.
 After Dwight William Tryon (American, 1849-1925)
 Wood engraving on Japan paper
 7 3/8 x 13 7/8 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

Books and Photographs

22. *Cart 46*, n.d.
 Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
 Photograph
 6 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches
 The Perry G. Vienot Collection

23. *Cart 47*, n.d.
 Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
 Photograph

6 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection

24. Hadley West, n.d.
Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
Photograph
4 5/8 x 6 15/16 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
25. Poems of Nature, 1886
John Greenleaf Whittier (American, 1807-1892)
Illustrated by Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
Houghton, Mifflin and Co., New York
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
26. Dinner in the Steerage
Scribner's Monthly, September 1877
Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
New York: Scribner's and Sons
Volume 14, Issue 5
The Perry G. Vienot Collection
27. *The King's Jester*
Scribner's Monthly, April 1881
Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
New York: Scribners and Sons
Volume 21, Issue 5
The Siercks Collection
28. *Whatley Glen*, n.d.
Elbridge Kingsley (1842-1918)
Photograph
6 1/2 inches x 8 1/2 inches
The Perry G. Vienot Collection