

# Xenophon Cleveland: A Nineteenth-Century Artist and His Stencils

By JOSEPH CLEVELAND CARTER

**X**ENOPHON Cleveland—artist, decorator, and designer—was born March 11, 1839, in Sussex, New Brunswick, one of the maritime provinces of eastern Canada. He was one of twelve children of a farmer, Isaac Cleveland, and his wife, Catherine (Hayward) Cleveland.

Xenophon's paternal ancestral line in New England extends back through six generations of Clevelands to when Moses Cleveland migrated in 1635 to Woburn, Massachusetts, from Ipswich (Suffolk County, northeast of London), England, where he was born about 1624.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the American Revolution, particularly in the years immediately preceding the start of warfare, the Clevelands and many other crown-supporting families of Massachusetts were British Loyalists and removed to New Brunswick, many of them settling in and around St. John on the Bay of Fundy.

Absolutely nothing is known about Xenophon's formal education. However, it is recorded that he lived at his birthplace, Sussex, until he was eleven years old, then lived in St. John until he was about seventeen, followed by three years at the home of his uncle, Lemuel Cleveland, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. After Lemuel died in 1859, Xenophon (then twenty) returned to New Brunswick and resided in Moncton until 1866.

During the next two years Xenophon must have worked in Massachusetts, for in 1868 he was married in Leominster to Cornelia Margaret Hall, a native of

nearby Worcester. (His younger brother, George Miles Cleveland, also born in Sussex, resided in Worcester and was a manufacturer of railroad car head linings and a decorator. In 1878 the two brothers returned to their native province and for several years were employed in Moncton by the Dominion government, decorating passenger cars for the Intercolonial—now the Canadian National—Railway.)

Xenophon's wife, Cornelia, died in Leominster in March, 1876 and the next year he married Eliza Anne Elliott, of Moncton. She was a native of Hampton, New Brunswick (near St. John), and was a daughter of a British-born merchant, John Elliott, and his wife, Harriet (Ruggles) Elliott.<sup>2</sup> They lived in Steadman Street in Moncton. From Xenophon's first marriage came two daughters, Mabel Hall and Alma Beatrice, both born in Worcester, and a son, Walter Carl, born in Leominster. Family tradition recalls that these children, after the death of their mother, were reared by their maternal grandparents, Oliver and Clarissa Hall.

To his second marriage were born two daughters, Grace Elliott and Georgia Amelia (my mother), and two sons, William Pugsley (who lived only a few months and whose baptismal record in the Reformed Episcopal Church identifies his father as a painter) and William Edgar, all in Moncton. These children probably were born (as my mother definitely was) in the picturesque three-story

house designed, built, and owned by Xenophon at Highfield and Princess Streets.

The Xenophon Clevelands lived in Moncton, where he was employed by the Intercolonial Railway, from 1877 until 1884 when he removed with his wife and

commissioned to decorate the interior of the new [1878] Pythian Hall [on Robinson Street] which style of architecture was copied from the old castle halls of England of the sixteenth century with hipped ceilings and tie beams. The frescoing was done in a graceful design and the walls were adorned with oil paintings, giving the place an air of con-



FIG. I. XENOPHON CLEVELAND: CORNER STENCIL  
S.P.N.E.A. Collection.

their three young children to Waltham, Massachusetts, and lived there about two years. (A taxpayers' list in the *Moncton Times* shows that in the year 1880 Xenophon Cleveland was a \$14.66 ratable in that New Brunswick town.)

Kathlyn Downing Palmer in her recently published book, *The Moncton Family YMCA*, calls Xenophon Cleveland "Moncton's first resident artist" and adds that, at age thirty-nine, he was:

tinental grandeur. Paintings by Xenophon Cleveland are [in 1972] in the possession of Miss Charlotte Davison, [a resident of Moncton], who is a granddaughter of H.[enry] C. Davison [who was the husband of Xenophon Cleveland's sister, Charlotte].<sup>3</sup>

The same volume adds that in the fall of 1878 "Mr. X. Cleveland placed his numerous paintings for sale [in Moncton] in the windows of the Peter McSweeney dry goods store and the R. R.

& J. E. Smith's Book Store."<sup>4</sup> A later page of the same book carries the comment that his decoration of the "Pythian Temple" was "an outstanding artistic achievement."<sup>5</sup>

Xenophon's decorations were appreciatively regarded by Oscar Wilde, "art for art's sake" cultist and poet, when he toured Eastern Canada in 1882 (following his tour of the United States), lectur-

Among my family papers is an old clipping from a newspaper (unnamed and undated) bearing the title, "Canoeing on the Restigouche." The news report evidently was published in the 1880's, probably in one of the newspapers of Moncton, New Brunswick. The report states:

Mr. Xenophon Cleveland, formerly of Moncton, has spent several seasons in the New

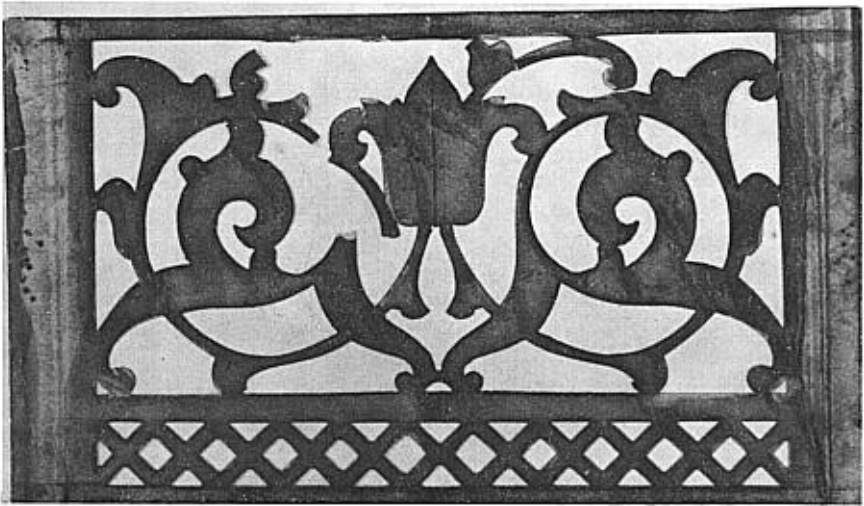


FIG. 2. XENOPHON CLEVELAND: BORDER STENCIL  
S.P.N.E.A. Collection.

ing on the aesthetic movement in modern art. His two principal lectures were "The Decorative Arts" and "The House Beautiful." Wilde spent ten days in the Maritimes, and, while he was in Moncton, Kevin H. F. O'Brien reported: "citizens took him [Wilde] by carriage to points of interest, including the Pythian Hall, which he much admired, and Mr. George M. Cleveland's residence, on Highfield Street, which Wilde was to recommend later in St. John as an example of 'the house beautiful.'"<sup>6</sup>

Brunswick forests and on her rivers—to the good effects of which his fine paintings and sketchings sufficiently attest.

Mr. Cleveland returned a few days ago from a six weeks' canoeing and sketching trip on the Restigouche [in the northwestern corner of the province]. He left Boston June 16 and on the morning of the 18th arrived at Matapedia station [at the confluence of the Matapedia and Restigouche rivers in northern New Brunswick]. Here his canoe was provisioned and camping utensils [were] taken on board. As the current is too strong for paddling up the river, he was towed by a horse to the mouth of the Keswick [Kedgwick River].

Here, in descending the river, the real trip began. Mr. Cleveland's custom was to run down about five miles a day, pitching his tent when night came and landing to prepare the midday lunch or to sketch the scenery and the fishing camps.

The first camp visited was that of Mr. Rogers of Beverly, Mass. Further on, he visited Mrs. Wilmot's Indian House, one of the most beautiful places on the river. It was here that Lady Macdonald [wife of Sir John Alexander Macdonald, prime minister of the Dominion of Canada] and her party camped, and during her stay killed nine 30-lb. salmon. Mr. Cleveland had intended to take some photos for her of the camp at Indian House, but owing to an accident was delayed too long. He met her after breaking camp on her way to Matapedia, and made a photograph of her and the Indian in the canoe.

About two days after leaving Indian House the artist, [Mr. Cleveland], arrived at Brandy Brook, where were Mr. Fearing's and Dr. Mason's camps. He remained here about a week, and during his stay visited the French settlements and made sketches of many quaint interiors. From Dr. Mason's camp he again hired a team [that is, a horse] and ascended the Upsalquich about 30 miles to the "Forks," this occupying three days.

Here the Walthams [party] had been in camp two weeks. He made many sketches of the camp and photos of the party and the Indians and their canoe. The camp was broken and the whole party came to Matapedia. The Indians who accompanied the party poled back to Andover on the St. John River by again ascending the Restigouche which would take them about eight days. The canoes were those known as the Tobique. The Waltham party returned by way of St. John.

During the whole trip Mr. Cleveland ran considerable risk as he had no Indian guide, and literally had to "paddle his own canoe." He now says that he has no fear of getting into a canoe and descending even so swift a river as the Restigouche.

After his years in Waltham, Xenophon lived a while in Hyde Park (since 1917 a part of Boston), Massachusetts. In 1887, apparently while a resident of Hyde Park, he painted several large pic-

tures of the "Charles River Night Carnival" as seen at Waltham. He and his family resided in Hyde Park at least until November, 1890. Then in the spring of 1891 Xenophon, his wife, Eliza, and their three children moved to Texas—first to Laredo on the Rio Grande, and later to Fort Worth. During the following approximately three years in Texas, Xenophon apparently was employed as a free-lance photographer, although family tradition reports he had some decorating commissions (possibly fresco or tempera) at a palace in Mexico. In Laredo his children attended a private school, but in Fort Worth they were enrolled in the city public schools.

In February 1894 he and his family returned to New England, first to the Boston area, and then in April or May to Ashburnham, Massachusetts, where his daughters, Grace and Georgia, were educated at Cushing Academy. While his children were enrolled there (from 1895 to 1898), Xenophon painted the scenery and the drop curtain for a production of Shakespeare's tragic drama, "Macbeth," which was staged in the Cushing auditorium. The Cleverlands lived on School Street, a short distance from the academy.

He died of pneumonia at age sixty in 1899 in Springfield, Massachusetts (on the death certificate he was identified as a designer), and is buried beside his first wife, Cornelia, in Evergreen Cemetery, Leominster, in which city he was then recorded as a resident. While in Leominster he had been a decorator of parlor cars for at least seven years for the Fitchburg Railroad Company.

As an artist, Xenophon Cleveland was self-educated and never "took lessons" in painting or in designing or decorating.

His extensive and varied personal library has become widely scattered during the past seventy-four years since his death. Besides volumes of literature, history, art, religion, travel, science, and biography, his library also contained some "how-to" books about painting, designing, and working in a variety of artistic mediums.

He excelled in oil, fresco, watercolor, tempera, ink, and pencil. He also was skilled in stenciling (Fig. 1, 2),<sup>7</sup> photography (black-and-white, sepia-toning, and blue-print), repoussé, woodcarving, and magic-lantern slides. Besides working in the above mediums, he also designed and decorated chairs (including custom-made rockers), tables (especially Moorish or Turkish), wall plaques, and terra-cotta stands for plants and umbrellas.

Following the death in 1916 of his widow, Eliza Theal, many pieces of Xenophon Cleveland's creative work were preserved in private collections in Michigan, Vermont, and New Brunswick.

His New Brunswick landscapes—chiefly in oil, tempera, and pencil—featured the Bay of Fundy, Northumberland Strait, and the Restigouche River and forests, besides the camp sites of that famous hunting and fishing area. Many of his best oils portrayed giant salmon

caught in the Restigouche, besides fishing gear, canoes, and sportsmen and their camps during the late Victorian era. Many of the photographs he made during his decades of life in the United States are historically valuable today for their portrayal of the landscapes, people, houses, fashions, transportation, and other human activities of a bygone period.

I hope I shall not be accused of vain-glorious boasting about the accomplishments of an ancestor whom I have never seen—he died ten years before I was born. I do feel confident, however, that art lovers of both nations who have seen his work will say he was truly a productive, versatile, and talented artist, decorator, and designer who worked joyously in many mediums during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

His artistic creations were of the United States (chiefly Massachusetts and Texas) and of New Brunswick in Canada, and both nations rightfully can claim Xenophon Cleveland as their own. The people of both nations have been immensely enriched by his love of beauty which he expressed through his numerous handiworks, now widely dispersed by private sales, public auctions, and personal gifts since his first recorded "one-man show" almost a century ago in the store windows of Moncton Town.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Jones Cleveland and Horace Gillette Cleveland, *The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1899), Vol. 1, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd A. Machum, *A History of Moncton Town and City 1855 to 1965* (City of Moncton, 1965), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Kathlyn Downing Palmer, *The Moncton Family YMCA: A Century of Service for Youth 1870 to 1970* (Sackville, N. B.: Tribune Press, Ltd., 1972), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin H. F. O'Brien, *Oscar Wilde and the Maritimes*, Master of Arts Thesis, Department of History, University of New Brunswick, 1967, p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NEW ENGLAND ANTIQUITIES has a collection of his stencils and two of his art instructional books which I, as one of his heirs, gave to the Society a few years ago.