



*Courtesy of the Amherst Historical Society*

VIEW OF AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS, IN EARLY 1830'S  
Attributed to G. W. Mark

# George Washington Mark

By AGNES M. DODS

IN the early 1880's there hung in front of Miss Chloe Filly's millinery emporium a most remarkable sign: a modish bonnet with flowers and ribbons fashioned entirely from tin. This was the work of George Washington Mark who came to Greenfield, Massachusetts, from Charlestown, New Hampshire, in 1817. He is known to have married twice (the identity of either lady is still unknown), and although he had no children of his own he adopted two girls and a boy. Mark was a great reader and intensely interested in public affairs. He was the first man in Greenfield to cast a vote for Andrew Jackson when the latter ran for President. In 1825 he was listed as a member and one of the founders of the Third Congregational Society of Greenfield.

"The Count," as he was familiarly known, maintained an art gallery at his residence, now the site of the Mansion House. Here he exhibited paintings to the crowds who came from far and near to view them. What the curious must have seen remains somewhat of a mystery for none of Mark's paintings are available today.

In 1903, the late Judge Franklin Fessenden loaned his collection of Mark's pictures for an exhibition staged for Old Home Day of that year. Later these passed into the hands of Mrs. George Sheldon of Deerfield and Greenfield, where they remained hanging in a barn until Mrs. Sheldon's death in 1938. They were then sold to a New York department store.

The late Francis M. Thompson, author of the *History of Greenfield*, states

that although Mark was familiar with the principles of art he was unable to apply them properly. Mr. Thompson considered his "West Main Street in a Snowstorm" the best of all Mark's paintings, but unfortunately only a brief description of this exists today. In the Nehemiah Strong House, Amherst, is a landscape of that town depicted during the early 1830's. This has been attributed to Mark because of its curious lack of perspective.

An unknown critic in the *Gazette and Courier*, August 4, 1879, states that Mark "didn't know how to do poor work."

Mark at one time attempted to become a portrait painter, but later gave up the idea as it was not a paying proposition. The following advertisements appeared in the *Franklin Herald and Public Advertiser*, July 1822 and July 1824:

"G W Mark

Informs the public that he has resumed his former occupation in this place. Now, Gentlemen, live and let live, is the Old Proverb, bring on your work and give me a fair price and you will soon enable me to regain my loss, which was by fire. N. B. Sign Painting done in good Style, Orders for the adjoining country will be strictly attended to and all favors thankfully received."

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"G. W. Mark

Will be here from this date to Attend to his business in Painting"

The first advertisement refers to a fire which burned the artist's studio and all its

contents and which is recorded in the *History of Greenfield*: "June 8, 1822. Great fire on Federal Street. William Wilson's blacksmith shop, R. E. Field's shop and George W. Mark's paint shop (over Mr. Field's) were burned." Life was not easy for the "Count" for he again suffered loss by fire in 1873: "The old George Mark place on Main Street nearly destroyed by fire, Insurance \$800."

Mark is also known to have painted and probably to have stencilled the wooden chairs in vogue during his lifetime. Mrs. Lucy Cutler Kellogg of Greenfield states that his palette was composed of vivid colors indeed and that the artist often allowed eccentric ideas to creep into his compositions; where most artists would paint footsteps leading to a door, Mark would place them where ever he pleased. Mrs. Kellogg also states that her father at one time hired Mark to paint scenery for the Bernardston Town Hall, a task he often performed.

The artist died in Greenfield, July 29, 1879, and was said to have been buried in the coffin which he kept for many years under his bed. An examination of probate records shows that, like most artists, Mark

left little personal property beyond pictures, brushes and paints, and a few cherished articles of furniture.

#### FOOTNOTE

It is interesting to note how the above article came into being. I first learned of George Washington Mark through two brief items in the *History of Greenfield* quoted above. To learn more about the artist, I consulted Mrs. Lucy Cutler Kellogg, the author of the volume and a local historian. By word of mouth she told me interesting facts concerning Mark.

Since many artists advertised in newspapers, I searched the entire files of papers at the local library. The search was rewarding for I discovered that Mark tried his hand at portraits as well as landscapes. His death notice produced biographical material which I checked in the town history of Charlestown, N. H., where Mark was born. Probate court records were also checked.

It is hoped that this article will bring forth other material concerning the life and work of George Washington Mark, particularly the location of portraits painted by this man.

