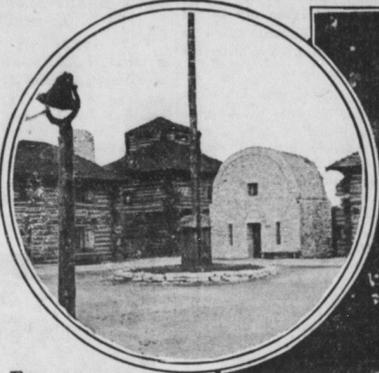


The Most Famous American Mother



The Reconstructed Fort Dearborn



Whistler's Portrait of His Mother

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



WHEN the special Mother's day stamps were placed on sale recently, there was added another chapter to the romantic story of a woman who is undoubtedly America's most famous mother. For the stamps bear the reproduction of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's famous painting which is called "Arrangement in Gray and Black," but which is more familiar to his fellow-Americans as "Whistler's Portrait of His Mother," or, more simply still, "The Mother."

Although Anna Mathilda McNeill Whistler needs nothing more than this painting to guarantee her immortality, yet the choice of her portrait for reproduction on a special commemorative stamp issue this year (the first time, incidentally, that such notice has been taken of Mother's day) is an additional honor conferred upon her. In all of our history, only three other women have had that distinction: Isabella, the Spanish queen; and Martha Washington, wife of our first President. But Anna Mathilda McNeill Whistler is not the only one who is honored in this year's Mother's day stamp. It was issued also to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the event which took place in Lowell, Mass., on July 10, 1834—the birth of the son who was to achieve such world-wide fame himself and to bring a similar world-wide fame to her by his portrait of her.

It is doubtful if any other painting ever put on canvas is so well known to so many people. Reproductions of it, running up into the millions in numbers, have been printed and these prints have gone to every corner of the earth. During the last year and a half, while it was in this country under a loan agreement from the French government, it was exhibited in 12 leading cities throughout the United States and it is estimated that during its triumphal tour more than 2,000,000 persons viewed it. Several hundred thousands more will have been added to that number before it is sent back to Paris late this month (for the agreement with the French government calls for its return by June 1) to resume its honored place in the Louvre.

For five months of the time that the painting was on a tour of the country it was exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute in connection with A Century of Progress. But among the thousands who saw it there and who also saw the replica of Fort Dearborn on the exposition grounds it is doubtful if one in a thousand realized that there was a historical, if not a cultural, link between the world-famous painting, the highest exemplification of a man's skill in the line of fine arts, and the crude architecture of a building which had only the very utilitarian purpose of preserving the lives of its inhabitants from savage hatred. That link is the theme of this story.

The story has its beginning in Ireland more than 175 years ago. In the year 1758 there was born to an English family named Whistler, living there, a son to whom was given the name of John. Long before he had reached his majority young John Whistler ran away from home and joined the British army. In 1777 he came to America as a soldier in the expedition with which "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne intended to deal a crushing blow to the American colonies. But the rapier thrusts of Daniel Morgan and Benedict Arnold warded off that blow at Saratoga, and the end of the year saw John Whistler a prisoner of war along with the rest of "Gentleman Johnny's" army. Mark that fact well, for it has a curious aftermath!

Before the end of the Revolution, Whistler, as a paroled or exchanged prisoner, was back in England where he soon afterwards was discharged from the army. Then he fell in love with the daughter of one of his father's friends, eloped with her, came to America a second time and settled at Hagerstown, Md. In 1791 this soldier who had worn the scarlet uniform of Old England put on the nondescript uniform of a lieutenant adjutant in the levies which made up a part of the army of the new republic. From that time on he served continuously on the Northwestern frontier under St. Clair, Wayne and others who were trying to break the power of the savage tribes that were resisting the westward push of the American frontiersmen.

In 1797 it was "Captain" John Whistler and in 1803 he was stationed at Detroit. The Louisiana Purchase had flung our frontier from the Mississippi back to the Rocky mountains, but if we hoped to make good our possession of this vast empire there must be garrisons in the heart of the Indian country. One of the strategic places for such a garrison was at the foot of Lake Michigan at a place variously called Chicago, Chikago, Chekakou and a half-dozen similar spellings. So, early in 1803, the Inspector-general of the army stationed at Cumberland, Md., gave orders for the building of a post there



Self-Portrait by Whistler (1859)



Bust of Whistler in Hall of Fame, New York University

and named Capt. John Whistler as commandant. Accordingly the fort was built in the summer of 1803, given the name of Fort Dearborn, in honor of Gen. Henry Dearborn, then secretary of war, and thus Capt. John Whistler became the real "father of Chicago." The original draft for the plans of the fort, drawn by Captain Whistler, is still in the archives of the War department at Washington—a good soldierly job, it is, but revealing none of the artistic qualities which were later to make the name of Whistler so famous.

For the next nine years John Whistler, as builder of the fort and its commandant, dominated the little community in this lonely outpost of civilization which was to become the second largest city in the United States. But the building and the commanding were not the only contributions he made to the history of Fort Dearborn and the beginnings of Chicago. He brought with him a growing family, some of whose members were destined for renown even greater than his.

His eldest son, William Whistler, accompanied him to Chicago as a second lieutenant and served there throughout the elder Whistler's term of service. His eldest daughter, Sarah, was married in November, 1804, to James Abbott, a trader of Detroit, thus becoming Chicago's first bride. Another daughter married Lieut. Joseph Hamilton, who was also a subaltern under Whistler at Fort Dearborn.

But our chief interest is in a toddling child of three who came with his father to Chicago in 1803. His name was George Washington Whistler. Thus did the ex-British soldier honor the great commander of the "rebels" against whom he had fought under Burgoyne. Young George Washington Whistler grew up into sturdy boyhood along the marshy shores of the Chicago river and on the sandy banks of Lake Michigan. He was only ten years old when, as the result of a garrison feud, the War department thought it advisable to scatter the officers at Fort Dearborn to various posts in the Middle West and the boy accompanied his father back to Detroit. And there, two years later, young George Washington Whistler probably witnessed the scene which made his father unique in American—and perhaps in any other—history.

For Capt. John Whistler and his elder son, Lieut. William Whistler, were officers in General Hull's army when that flustered American commander surrendered the fort at Detroit to the British at the outbreak of the War of 1812, and tradition says that the captain was so enraged over the capitulation that he broke his sword over his knee rather than surrender it to the enemy. Perhaps it was only the shame of a surrender without firing a shot that caused him to do it. Or perhaps it might have been his realization that he was destined to go down in history as the only British officer who, having once surrendered to a victorious American army, became in turn an American officer who surrendered to a victorious British army.

In due time John Whistler was exchanged for a British prisoner, and the choleric old captain remained in the American army only until the close of the war when he was honorably discharged. He died September 3, 1823, but he lived long enough to see his son, William, win some renown as an officer in the Indian and Mexican wars.

Old Capt. John Whistler also lived long enough to see his youngest son, George Washington Whistler, graduate from West Point at the age of nineteen and assigned to the artillery branch. But he was not to have the satisfaction of knowing to what heights his son would rise in another profession, nor to what greater heights this son's son would rise in still another.

While George Washington Whistler was still a cadet at West Point he once visited, while on leave, the home of a classmate, William Gibbs McNeill. It was a great brick mansion which had been built on a plantation near the Cape Fear river in North Carolina before the Revolution by one Donald McNeill, scion of a Scotch family that had emigrated to America from the Isle of Skye in 1730. There Cadet Whistler made the acquaintance of Anna Mathilda McNeill, the

eldest of a family of five children.

It would be pleasant to be able to record the fact that it was a case of love at first sight for Cadet Whistler and Anna McNeill. But that is doubtful, for soon after he was graduated from West Point he was married, but not to Anna McNeill. Shortly afterwards young Whistler was left a widower and early in the '30s he again met the motherly older sister of his classmate, William Gibbs McNeill, and married her. In 1833 Whistler resigned from the army and the next year to George Washington Whistler and Anna Mathilda Whistler was born a son to whom was given the name James Abbott McNeill Whistler, thus perpetuating the name of his uncle, James Abbott, the Detroit trader at Fort Dearborn, as well as his paternal and maternal families, the McNeills and the Whistlers.

After George Washington Whistler's resignation from the army he rose to eminence as an engineer and in 1842 he went to Russia to enter the service of the czar in the construction of the railroad from St. Petersburg to Moscow, winning for himself from Czar Nicholas the decoration of the Order of St. Anne. To Russia with him went his wife and their two sons, one of them a slender, weak lad, affectionately known to his mother as "Jamie." And "Jamie" he was to her to the end of her days, even when he became a world-famous painter. For the close tie between the mother and the son who was to immortalize her on canvas began during this Russian experience.

She nursed him during those bitter years and when they were ended in the death of Major Whistler and when the widow and her two sons were reduced to poverty, she brought them out of the land of snows back to her sunny North Carolina. When "Jamie" grew up he decided to follow the profession of his father and become a soldier. He secured an appointment to West Point in 1852, but his career there was a short one. In fact, it lasted only two years.

But the loss to the military world, if indeed it was a loss, was the gain of the world of art. After leaving West Point, Whistler went to Paris, resolved to become a painter, and his career in that role is too well known to need further comment. During the years he was rising to fame his mother was in Europe, also, not with him always, but nearly in case he should have need of her. For somehow her little "Jamie" never seemed to grow up enough to be without his mother. In 1860 Whistler left London for three years more of study in Paris and his mother returned to America for a last visit with her relatives in North Carolina. For Whistler had decided never to return to his native land to live. So his mother was going to wind up what few affairs she had there and then return to London, where they would live on the scant means which the son could provide.

While she was visiting in Cumberland and Bladen counties in North Carolina, the storm of the Civil war broke and her return to Europe was postponed indefinitely. Finally early in 1864 came word from her son that he had returned to London and established himself there. So she announced her intention of joining him.

But no matter how much her relatives told Anna Mathilda McNeill Whistler that it would be impossible for her to go to Europe now, her only reply was the calm statement that her "Jamie" needed her and she was going. And go she did. Somehow she arranged to take passage on a Confederate blockade runner and on it arrived safely in England.

There she lived to the end of her days, the inseparable companion of the man who came to be hailed as one of the greatest painters in the world.

By Western Newlander Union.

Mending Socks

By ALBERT WESTON

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KATRINA was obdurate. "I've got them socks to mend, Miss Lily," was the excuse she gave, and that to her was final.

"But I don't care about the old socks," countered Lily, with voice pitched high in argument. "When you came to work here it was on the understanding that you were to come regularly from one to five every day—and for dinner any time we wanted you to. And we pay you more an hour than is usual."

"Yes, Miss Lily, but I've got them socks to mend for one of my young men, and he's only got just enough and I've got to mend them."

"But I tell you that everything depends on this little dinner. My brother didn't let me know until this noon that he was bringing this gentleman home, and I can't get anyone else now, and besides no one else would do."

So they argued until, at last, Lily learned that the socks and other apparel in need of mending were now resting in a large bag that hung in the back hall. Katrina had done her usual round of work for her young men, as she called the three or four bachelors whose apartments she kept in order during her morning hours. She would take the things home with her, mend them that evening and leave them for the young man when she went to his apartment the next morning.

"Let me have the socks and things. I'll mend them," said Lily. "And you stay and finish dinner and serve it."

Lily made very neat patches on three pairs of pajamas, sewed missing buttons on shirts and underwear and then turned her attention to half a dozen pairs of socks. And then it occurred to Lily that she had better be dressed and ready and might then go on with her darning until her brother and his guest arrived. It was fortunate, too, because instead of arriving at half past six, as she had expected, they arrived before six.

She met Julian Bates and rather liked him, despite her brother's warnings that he was bullet proof as far as girls were concerned. "He's all for business," Marvin had said. "So don't waste your pretty tricks on him. Anyway, you're not his sort. He likes 'em simple and domestic. That's why he's girl-proof. There aren't any simple, domestic girls nowadays."

Marvin excused himself and his friend and took him to his study adjoining the living room where he had some plans he wanted to show him. So Lily drew a sock from the work basket—a rather vivid, striped golf sock much in need of repair. With feverish haste she worked over it, weaving evenly back and forth over her darning ball. But Marvin and Julian Bates returned from the study—and were standing beside her before she had had time to finish the sock and tuck it out of sight.

"Pretty domestic scene," grinned Marvin. "But really she isn't like that, Julian. I told her you liked old-fashioned girls—so she's doing this for effect."

"Marvin always tries to say something that he thinks is funny," said Lily, flashing a dark glance to Marvin and smiling up to Julian. But she had tucked the stocking into the basket and had no intention of going on with her work. "I always mend Marvin's socks," she said, "but I am afraid he doesn't appreciate it."

"Was that one of Marvin's socks?" asked Julian abruptly.

"It must have been," was the way Lily answered his impertinence.

After dinner Lily excused herself—said she wanted to help Katrina in the kitchen. But she took her mending basket with her and worked furiously away to get the darning done before Katrina wanted to leave. Lily never helped Katrina in the kitchen, Marvin knew perfectly well. He suggested making a tour of inspection. They entered the kitchen just as Lily had begun to work on the last sock and had the others all laid neatly out on the kitchen table. Julian saw them as they lay there—saw and noticed before Lily had time to ram them into Katrina's ample bag.

Much to Marvin's surprise his friend Julian Bates became decidedly attentive to his sister when they returned to the living room. And when he left he asked permission to make his party call very soon and said that after that he would beg her to dine with him.

When Marvin saw Julian the next day in the course of their business activities, Marvin spoke with big-brotherly lightness of his sister's charms. "She's kidding you, Julian," he warned. "Trying to make you think she's the sweet, simple old-fashioned sort of girl."

"But the amazing thing," said Julian, "is that she was darning my socks. You'll have to admit that if you met a pretty girl and the first time you saw her you found her mending your old socks you would be—well, rather touched. Do you think I could drop around tonight for a few minutes—just to finish solving the mystery."

"Solve ahead," said Julian. "I'm going out myself."

The mystery was, of course, very easily solved, and so more time was left for a discussion of personal tastes and likes and dislikes—and other preliminaries of the courtship for which Julian was already making plans.

Then when they came to make plans for the wedding Julian chose Marvin for his best man. "And I suppose I ought to have Katrina for the maid of honor," said Lily.

FRUIT TREES A GOOD BET

Some years ago so many orchards were planted that there was an overabundance, but this condition promises to be greatly changed in the future. Many orchards have been allowed to die out and the time is coming when fruit will be in much better demand. As it is too late to start an orchard after the demand has come, it is a wise plan to invest a little in this form of land improvement. The trees cost so little that this does not have to prevent anybody from having an orchard, or at least a few select trees. The United States is especially blessed because fruit of some sort can be grown in every state. We should appreciate this fact all the more when we remember that in many countries fruit is such a luxury that it is beyond the reach of average people.—Pathfinder Magazine.

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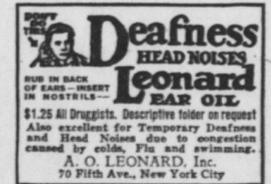
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