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THE LANDSCAPE IMAGES AND EARLY MODELS OF LAND PROTECTION THAT CREATED YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

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THE LANDSCAPE IMAGES AND EARLY MODELS OF LAND PROTECTION
THAT CREATED YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS OF THE CITY COLLEGE OF THE CITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

BY
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Introduction

And behold! The whole country beyond was smoking with vapor from boiling springs, and burning with gases issuing from small craters, each of which was emitting a sharp, whistling sound. The general face of the country was smooth and rolling, being a level plain, dotted with cone-shaped mounds. On the summit of these mounds were small craters from four to six feet in diameter. Interspersed among these on the level plain were larger craters, some of them four to six miles across. Out of these craters, issued blue flames and molten brimstone.

—Joseph Meek, as told to Frances Fuller Victor, The River of the West

Yellowstone National Park, the world’s first National Park, covers approximately 3,500 square miles of land within the borders of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. (Fig. 1)

Among its unique characteristics are the Grand Canyon—whose yellow rock cliffs provide the area its name—and over 10,000 hydrothermal features including boiling mud pots and geysers that reach up to 300 feet.¹ These unique geological characteristics attracted European-Americans, who until their discovery of the area in the first half of the 19th century had not seen such features in abundance in North America. Before any images of Yellowstone had been publicized, early fur trappers and mountain men like Joseph Meek, quoted above, described the strange features in published travel accounts. Respectable periodicals such as Scribner’s and The New York Tribune considered the rumors of boiling mud pots and blue fire unreliable material and not fit for publication.² It was not until artist Thomas Moran (1837–1926) and photographer William Henry Jackson (1843–1942) traveled to Yellowstone and returned with paintings, drawings, and

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photographs that visual proof of the area’s wonders were able to persuade disbelievers—even Congress was convinced that it was land worth protecting for the benefit of the people.3

Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872 when President Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) signed the act making it the world’s first national park.4 Among the groups that helped shape the decision to create the park are artists who produced landscape images in the Hudson River School tradition, explorers who strove to record the natural wonders of uncharted territory, and the public who responded to the images and accounts and traveled to the Yellowstone region, making it the tourist destination that it still is today. This thesis will discuss how these groups contributed to the creation of Yellowstone National park, emphasizing the importance of the images created and distributed leading up to 1872. Influential upon all three groups are romantic attitudes towards nature influenced by Transcendentalism.5 Transcendentalism, which was based on the belief that experiencing nature allowed people to transcend the material world and become closer to God, incorporated many different spheres of expression starting in the early 19th century, including poetry, literature, and art.6 Transcendentalism in New

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3 Moran and Jackson participated in a geological survey with Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden in 1871, which produced a report that convinced Congress to vote for the park’s creation. Ferdinand V. Hayden, Report to the Committee on the Public Lands, House Report 764, 42nd Congress, 2d session, February 27, 1872, reproduced in Marlene Deahl Merrill, Yellowstone and the Great West: Journals, Letters, and Images from the 1871 Hayden Expedition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), appendix 4, 213–233.


6 Part of the reason Transcendentalism became so popular is because genres like literature, poetry, and art were all published together in periodicals. In the first half of the 19th century, magazines and journals that
England was based on Immanuel Kant’s theory of the same name, developed in Germany in the late 1700s. By the time the changing ideas traveled to the United States in the 1830s, it had evolved into a distinctly different philosophy that was inherently tied to Puritan religious ideals.\(^7\) Transcendentalist scholar Frederick Ives Carpenter explained the main difference between European and American Transcendentalism as one of religion:

American Transcendentalism was primarily religious rather than philosophical. Its inspirational force was what [Ralph Waldo] Emerson called “the religious sentiment,” rather than the Kantian “Reason” on the one hand, or the merely practical desire to reform society on the other. It developed the “piety” of the early Puritans rather than their logical theology or their social “moralism.”\(^8\)

The religious aspect of early American Transcendentalism attracted an audience in New England who were drawn to the ideals of Unitarianism, which rejected the Holy Trinity and emphasized Jesus’ humanity and role as God’s messenger, not an incarnation of God Himself.\(^9\) This allowed room for ways to connect with God alternative to regular church visits. By immersing oneself in nature—that which has been untouched by man—a person could interact with the direct creation of God, rather than a man-made interpretation such as a Pastor or a church. This idea, outlined by Ralph Waldo Emerson

\(^{9}\) Ibid., 27.
(1803–1882) in 1836 became a popular subject throughout New England and lead to the distribution of Transcendentalist ideas through periodicals and images alike.\(^\text{10}\)

The role of Transcendentalism in the creation of Yellowstone National Park was established due to the increase of literature and publications dedicated to educating the public of the philosophy.\(^\text{11}\) Since the ideals of Transcendentalism were often tied to examples of nature—as Emerson’s foundational 1836 text, *Nature*—embracing tourism’s opening up of landscapes to the public was a natural progression. Earlier paintings and prints that referenced the sublime appreciation of landscapes, like early images of Niagara for example, cannot be categorized as Transcendentalism because the term had not yet been defined, but do contribute to the romantic precedent from which writers like Emerson drew in order to define the philosophy.\(^\text{12}\)

The federal government's decision to protect Yellowstone for public use directly results from an intricate web of connections between people, places, and movements. At the center of the web are images and texts born from Transcendentalism, tourism, and landscape image production. Because of these simultaneous developments, government statutes concerning Niagara Falls and the Yosemite Valley became models of land protection for Yellowstone. By analyzing the images and texts found at junctures in the web, I will argue that the governmental initiative to establish a national park was based on these two land protection models.

\(^\text{10}\) Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836).

\(^\text{11}\) In addition to *Nature*, written by Emerson and published in Boston in 1836, popular Transcendentalist publications include Cincinnati’s *Western Messenger* starting in 1835, *The Boston Quarterly Review* in 1838, and Boston’s *The Dial* first issued in 1840, which was the primary Transcendentalist publication and helped launch the writings of Emerson, editor Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), and contributor Bronson Alcott (1799–1888). Gohdes, *The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism*, 15–19.

\(^\text{12}\) In addition to defining Transcendentalism, Immanuel Kant also solidified the theory of the sublime in relation to nature, which describes that which is appealing and threatening simultaneously. See Page 19.
While there is a broad range of scholarship on the history of the National Parks System, and of Yellowstone in particular, there are few approaches to the images of Yellowstone and their role in the tourist movement in the few decades leading up to 1872. The existing scholarship on this area of American history is divided into two categories. The first is the analysis of landscape images of Yellowstone National Park, as presented by art historian Peter Hassrick in his 2002 volume, *Drawn to Yellowstone: Artists in America’s First National Park*. Hassrick organizes in his analysis of Yellowstone images as a survey, starting with ancient Native American accounts of hunting in the area and ending with the modern artists in the 20th century who traveled into the area for a renewed relationship with nature. Hassrick proves the continuous influence of Yellowstone on many generations of artists, but does not attempt a significant exploration of the artists’ influence on the process of Yellowstone becoming a national park.

The second category of scholarship on the subject is exemplified by the comprehensive analysis of Yellowstone’s history written by historian, Aubrey Haines. The most inclusive of Haines’s studies of the area is *Yellowstone National Park: Its Exploration and Establishment*, from 1974. Although images are included in his thorough analysis of Yellowstone’s history, Haines’s primary foci are the historical facts that directly relate to Yellowstone’s growth as a national park, namely, the many prospecting and fact-finding expeditions that took place in the 19th century. Despite his in-depth

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analysis, Haines does not place images or their Transcendentalist qualities in an active position in the creation of the park.

I will approach the subject by presenting the tourist development of Niagara Falls and the Yosemite Valley respectively as case studies that established a model of land protection for Yellowstone—Yosemite as a model of what to do to protect land for public use; Niagara as a model of what not to do. The tourist development of all three of these areas is evident in the visual and written accounts of those who experienced the areas as part of scientific expeditions and independent travel. I will compare these accounts to reactions by the public and by the government. I will argue that the influence of these images and accounts could not have been as strong without the larger cultural embrace of Transcendentalist attitudes. By examining the early exploration of Niagara, Yosemite, and Yellowstone, the images and accounts that were produced from those explorations, and the broader cultural attitudes towards nature from this perspective, I will provide a contribution to Yellowstone scholarship stressing the importance of this web of connections on the creation of the first park.
Chapter One: Niagara

And now I must turn to another of the beautifiers of the earth—the Waterfall; which in the same object at once presents to the mind the beautiful, but apparently incongruous idea, of fixedness and motion—a single existence in which we perceive unceasing change and everlasting duration. The waterfall may be called the voice of the landscape, for, unlike the rocks and woods which utter sounds as the passive instruments played on by the elements, the waterfall strikes its own chords, and rocks and mountains re-echo in rich unison.


Even though the development of Niagara Falls began nearly forty years before that of Yellowstone in the 1870s, both areas share natural characteristics that artists, writers, and tourists alike all admired enough to describe to their fellow Americans. Artist Thomas Cole’s (1801–1848) 1835 comments on the poetry of the nation’s waterfalls was published before European-Americans had seen Yellowstone, but his description is no less relevant to the Upper Yellowstone Falls than it is to Niagara Falls. William James Bennett’s 1831 engraving, View of the British Fall Taken from Goat Island (Fig. 2) illustrates the “unceasing change and everlasting duration” that Cole describes in his essay by showing the Falls in action, tumbling over the rocky cliffs and emptying into the unseen abyss below. Bennett’s print shows a group of travelers resting and admiring the view of the Falls, which is framed by the other elements of nature Cole discusses—trees, rocks, and sky.

Despite the difference in medium, the picture shares a raison d’être with Cole’s 1830, Distant View of Niagara Falls (Fig. 10) which is the portrayal of visitors admiring the landscape. Cole’s painting shows two Native Americans resting on a rocky outcrop that overlooks both falls, and Bennett’s shows a group of white, upper-class visitors
picnicking on Goat Island in between the two falls. The difference in how the two artists imagine the visitors is a telling indication of the medium in which each artist chose to work. Cole’s image is an oil painting, which hangs on a wall and is viewed only if one travels to see it, for only one exists. Cole’s visitors are Native Americans in full traditional dress, who appear to be the only sign of human life in the area. In addition to the traditional dress, Cole’s figures are not highlighted—he used the same colors to paint them as he used to paint the rocks and trees and leaves, visually categorizing them as one with nature, rather than an outsider observing from afar. The standing figure holds a weapon over one shoulder and a small purse on the other, contributing to the romantic vision of the natural landscape—a representation of the nation’s impressive natural characteristics. Bennett’s print, which was distributed as a souvenir print of a typical Niagara Falls experience, highlights the portion of rock on which the group of figures sits, separating them from nature and sending a message to the viewers that they too can have a pleasurable picnic experience at the foot of the Falls.

As tourist travel in the United States became more popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, roughly simultaneously with the increasing number of Transcendentalist writings being published, Niagara became one of the most fashionable locations to visit. So much so, that the area was soon over-built with tourist attractions, ultimately distracting from the natural scenery that attracted visitors in the first place. The development at Niagara Falls combined with the American public’s growing embrace of a Transcendentalist perspective on nature resulted in a land protection model Yellowstone lawmakers used as an example of what to avoid. Presenting Niagara as a

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model for Yellowstone brings a number of questions to the surface including: Did Transcendentalism contribute to Niagara’s development? How did tourist experiences of Niagara differ from each other and for what reasons? Where do the development of Transcendentalism and that of Niagara fit into the web of connections that resulted in the creation of Yellowstone National Park? By answering these questions, I will argue that tourist development at Niagara and the concurrent rise of the Transcendentalist movement in America created a foundational model from which Yellowstone National Park was created.

The Hudson River School & Transcendentalist Ideals

Apart from published literature, the main way people in the United States were exposed to Transcendentalism was through Hudson River School paintings, which provided viewers a way to connect with God that was accessible to all—seeking solitude in nature. Historian Richard H. Gassan described the development of American tourists’ appreciation of wilderness shared by Transcendentalists and Hudson River School artists as,

Beginning in the mid-1700s, European thinkers began to change their view of wild terrain. Nature, these writers argued, was the source of all that was truly authentic; in wildness was a source of inspiration and strength. This way of thinking was, in American society… radical in the 1810s [but] began gaining a wider currency by the mid-1820s. This happened, in part, through the impact of tourism. As Americans began to change how they thought about their country’s nature, its depiction in American art likewise began to change. In the end, it would create significant cultural movements, ranging from a whole new school of American literature to the first truly American Art, the work of the Hudson River School.16

Hudson River School painters showed their viewers that like “the prophets of old,” they too could retire “into the solitudes of nature to wait the inspiration of heaven”\(^\text{17}\) by showing inviting natural landscapes, mostly untouched by human presence. Viewing these popular paintings that encouraged people to spend time outdoors as well as the expansion of transportation services encouraged Americans to visit the nation’s natural wonders, the rapid increase of tourists at Niagara in the 1840s allowed private interests to take advantage of travelers.\(^\text{18}\)

Within the realm of art, painting was one popular way to express or to view the expression of one’s relationship to nature. Starting in the 1820s Thomas Cole led a movement of landscape painters who created detailed and illusionistic paintings depicting American nature scenes. The first paintings of this movement were representations of the Hudson River Valley in New York, and the group of painters was therefore termed the Hudson River School. Even though Cole and most of the other Hudson River School painters traveled to Europe to study the Romantic masters, the movement was known as the first truly American artistic movement due to its artists’ drive to represent the spirit of the American wilderness as a component of national identity.\(^\text{19}\)


The Hudson River School landscape painting movement began in the mid-1820s and reached its peak in its second generation of artists in the 1870s. The Hudson River school has since been categorized by art historians into sub-groups such as Luminism, which produced small landscapes that focused on the effects of light on calm atmospheres; and the Grand Style, which produced large landscapes that focused on America’s urge for western expansion. Both of these sub-groups can be described as developments of the traditional Hudson River School style that catered to different audiences. Joseph S. Czestochowski describes the departure from the traditional Hudson River School style to the Grand Style by saying,

“The wilderness message could no longer be dealt with as in Cole’s moral allegories. Successive generations of individualists had replaced it with a landscape spirit that was more expressive and responsive to the visual reality of our surroundings.”

What began as a visual representation of natural scenes of the Northeast, evolved as the nation’s relationship to and awareness of what natural beauty the entire country possessed. Also intrinsic to the second generation or Grand Style of the Hudson River School, was the westward expansion of the United States’ population. Evolving from the school’s initial representation of American landscape as one of—if not it’s most valuable—national features, the Grand Style embraced the rapidly increasing access to unexplored areas of nature and the extensive variety of geology and botany that the west encompassed. But this westward expansion was not just delightful discovery of new

20 Barbara Novak describes the evolution of landscape painting genres in mid-nineteenth century America as falling into these two categories: the Grand Style, or large dramatic paintings that followed in European history paintings’ footsteps, and the smaller, less conventional Luminism, which was less popular because it had little to do with western expansion. Barbara Novak, *American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
scenes to paint and show the audiences back east. It also required imagining that all the land in the western part of the country was unoccupied and free for the taking. As art historian Albert Boime stated,

> While acknowledging distinctions of light, technique, and compositional strategies in individual cases, I believe these differences, however, are less significant than the central, underlying component that the Hudson River and luminist artists all share and that unites them across generations: the desire to carve out unity, harmony, and order from endless vistas.  

This unity, harmony, and order that Boime suggests is carved out by all Hudson River School artists necessarily includes a vision of national ownership over the endless vistas they painted. The idea of Manifest Destiny—that cultural expansion and land ownership was an American privilege—was inherent to the popularity of Hudson River School images. The harmonious landscapes celebrated in the paintings communicated to their viewers that anyone could move west to pursue a new start by developing the land on which they settled.

In 1835 Cole published his *Essay on American Landscape Painting*, which solidified the views of the movement for landscape painters to follow. In his essay, Cole describes each landscape component in detail and explains why each is vital to fully experience the beauty of nature. He states that the effect experiencing nature is equivalent to that of poetry and painting,

> Rural nature is full of the same quickening spirit—it is, in fact, the exhaustless mine from which the poet and the painter have brought such wondrous treasures—an unfailing fountain of intellectual enjoyment, where all may drink, and be awakened to a deeper feeling of the works of

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One year after Cole’s influential essay was written, the young writer Ralph Waldo Emerson anonymously published his own thoughts on the American landscape, *Nature*, in 1836. This essay proved to be the first step of many Emerson took towards Transcendentalism including the creation of the Transcendentalist Club, which produced *The Dial*, the periodical that first published the writings of Henry David Thoreau.²⁴

Emerson echoes Cole’s appreciation for “rural nature,” by addressing the difference between the poetic experience of wilderness and humans’ resourceful use of land:

> When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eyes can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet.²⁵

“The poet and the painter” from Cole’s essay are ones who, according to Emerson, are capable of transcendence through nature. Through the submission to solitude and recognition that no one owns nature, Emerson suggests one can transcend the material world and at once connect to both heaven and earth. Emerson’s statement that landowners don’t own the landscape is especially relevant to Niagara Falls, whose development rapidly increased due to private landowners desire for profit. Landscape artists painting in the Romantic tradition visualized Emerson’s idea of nature existing

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separate from man’s ownership by painting seemingly untouched landscapes that invited the viewer to enjoy nature without the interference of other people. For Emerson, the path to God was not through churches or cathedrals, which are built by people, but in nature—God’s direct creation; “Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue.”

Though, unlike Cole, Emerson doesn’t address the specific applications of art as a representation of beauty, he does insist that art is “the result or expression of nature, in miniature.” Both authors suggest that the many individual details of nature together contribute to the sublime experience. Cole structured his essay around parts of the landscape he thought it important to include in poetry and painting including the sky, forest, waterfalls, rivers, and trees. Of nature’s details Emerson stated,

Every particular in nature, a leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world.

Both Emerson’s and Cole’s descriptions of detail within nature are reflected in the paintings of the Hudson River School. In Cole’s *Distant View of Niagara*, the layers and breaking points of the rocky ledge in the foreground of are painted with the same attention to detail as the billowing spray of the distant waterfalls. Each separate element contributes to the natural harmony of the landscape. The inclusion of every tiny detail within the frame of one canvas was a stylistic characteristic of Hudson River School paintings even throughout the second generation, when canvases became larger and landscapes more dramatic. As the leader of the Hudson River School, Thomas Cole paved the way for decades of landscape painters who famously depicted American

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26 Ibid., 25.
27 Ibid., 29.
28 Ibid., 55
wilderness scenes from New York to California and in the process, encouraged the American people to travel to these sublime locations, serving as a catalyst for the development of tourism in America.

In the 1820s and 1830s, paintings such as *Falls of the Kaaterskill* (Fig. 4) painted in 1826 showed the Northeastern landscape as one of “divine wilderness.” In this painting, Cole visualizes his idea of divine wilderness, which he described in his *Essay on American Scenery* as:

The delight [he who looks on nature with a ‘loving eye’] experiences is not merely sensual, or selfish, that passes with the occasion leaving no trace behind; but in gazing on the pure creations of the almighty, he feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate.²⁹

Cole presented *Falls of the Kaaterskill* as a representation of this idea by using tonal differences to highlight different areas of the painting and by paying close attention to the details of the landscape, as Emerson highlighted in *Nature*. In the top portion of the painting, dark clouds loom over three layers of mountain rocks, the lowest of which produces a glowing waterfall, which is highlighted by a beam of sunlight coming through the dark clouds above. The waterfall empties actively on an unkempt formation of rocks in the bottom center of the picture plane. At the point where the water hits the rocks below, the most white on the entire canvas is applied. This highlighting effect, which Cole also used in *Distant View of Niagara Falls*, and which was used again and again by Hudson River School artists after Cole, draws the viewer’s eye to the center of the image and the center of the action. The visual hierarchy places the active portion of the scene as

most important, which is how the sublimity—the simultaneous excited attraction and fearful repulsion—is conveyed in the natural landscape.

The American landscape painters who worked in the 1850s–80s and painted in the tradition of the Hudson River School are often referred to as the second generation of Hudson River School painters. The distinction between the two generations can be marked by the death of Thomas Cole in 1848 and the following rise of his champion student, Frederic Edwin Church. However, in addition to the temporal division between generations, there is also a stylistic shift that occurred with the western expansion of the United States. As western areas were acquired by the American government and deemed territories and states, Hudson River School painters traveled to these unexplored locations and produced massive canvases that reflected the wide open spaces of the West.

The first generation of Hudson River School paintings didn’t evoke the same type of sublime reaction as did the paintings of the second generation, primarily because the latter depicted larger, more dramatic landscapes of the American West. This was also because by the second generation, the Hudson River School style had grown in popularity and profitability, so the artists promoted their own paintings by presenting them in exhibitions with pamphlets and artifacts from their travels. Still, the experience of the sublime landscape drew viewers to the locations depicted in the paintings. Americans were also inspired to travel because of the technological and economic development in major cities; people wanted to return to nature, even if they had lived in the city their whole lives. Cole recognizes this as an important attraction to nature, stating,

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30 Frederic Church’s *The Heart of the Andes* was exhibited in New York City’s Studio Building in 1859 with accompanying pamphlets that read like travel guides, taking the viewer through the painting’s terrain. Kevin Avery, *Church’s Great Picture: The Heart of the Andes Exhibited* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).
[Towards a] cultivated state our western world is fast approaching; but nature is still predominant, and there are those who regret that with the improvements of cultivation the sublimity of the wilderness should pass away: for those scenes of solitude from which the hand of nature has never been lifted, affect the mind with a more deep toned emotion than aught which the hand of man has touched.31

This desire to escape the city combined with the growing accessibility of steamboat travel in the 1820s and railroad travel in the 1830s allowed for tourist development in naturally pleasing locations like the Hudson River Valley and further upstate, Niagara Falls.32 Both locations catered to travelers by providing comfortable lodging and safe walkways to the best viewpoints. In the Hudson River Valley, the Catskill Mountain House quickly became a popular travel destination for tourists and landscape painters alike.

The Mountain House opened in 1824 and was known for its comfortable accommodations and spectacular view. The view from the house, which sat atop South Mountain in the Catskills, was depicted on postcards and engravings like View from The Mountain House, a W. H. Bartlett engraving from 1836 by R. Branford (Fig. 5). Tourists are rendered as casually enjoying the view from the manicured lawn surrounding the house. In a written account from 1826, a visitor from Boston described his encounter with The Mountain House as one of delight:

After threading in the dark for two or three hours a perfect wilderness, without a trace save our narrow road, to burst thus suddenly upon a splendid hotel and, glittering with lights, and noisy with the sound of the piano and the hum of gaiety - it was like enchantment. I seated myself in the drawing room, and was for a moment bewildered. It was in keeping with the place; for so was Rip Van Winkle when he woke upon that very spot. But to find myself in an

32 Steamboat travel to Niagara Falls and the Hudson River Valley began in 1825 with the completion of the Erie Canal. Railroad travel to the Falls began in 1851, and connected the popular tourist spots to major cities like Philadelphia and New York City. Linda S. Ferber, "Landscape Views and Landscape Visions,"10.
elegant room, fashionably furnished, and thronged with
people promenading to the sound the piano - in such a
place!\textsuperscript{33}

Even in 1826, just two years after opening, this visitor describes the common room as full
of patrons and later states that the house accommodates up to 300 people.\textsuperscript{34} The
Mountain House became a popular hotel in the early 1820s for Cole and his fellow
painters; The Falls of the Kaaterskill and a handful of other well-known paintings by
Cole were painted not far from the hotel.\textsuperscript{35}

History & Early Encounters with Niagara

At Niagara Falls, about 350 miles west of the Catskill Mountain House, and accessible by
steamboat starting in the late 1820s, similar rapid development occurred to accommodate
to growing tourist demands.\textsuperscript{36} Niagara Falls had always been a trading post for Native
Americans in the area, so when the presence of Europeans increased in the 17th century,
trading increased and the Falls were thrust into use as an important place for commerce.\textsuperscript{37}
The first image of the Falls was a 1678 engraving after a sketch by Flemish Catholic
priest and explorer of North America, Father Louis Hennepin. (Fig. 6) Hennepin’s
depiction of Niagara focuses on the action of the falls, both of which are located in the
center of the picture plane. The falls empty into the lower part of the river, crashing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} “A Visit to the Mountain House,” \textit{Boston Recorder And Telegraph}, (October 6, 1826).
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Other images by Cole that either feature the Mountain House or depict locations nearby include \textit{Lake with Dead Trees}, 1825 (oil painting, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College); \textit{From the Top of Kaaterskill Falls}, 1826 (oil painting, Detroit Institute of Art); and \textit{View of the Catskill Mountain House, N.Y.}, 1831 (steel plate engraving, Middlebury College). Kenneth John Myers, “Above the Clouds at Sunrise: Frederic Church’s Memorial to Thomas Cole,” in \textit{The Cultured Canvas} ed. Nancy Siegel, (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 53–84.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Ferber, “Landscape Views and Landscape Visions,” \textit{9}.
\end{itemize}
violently just feet away from onlookers in the distance. Four figures in the foreground, situated opposite the gigantic Falls, stare in disbelief; their hands either outstretched towards the action, or holding their heads in astonishment. Of his first experience viewing the Falls, Father Hennepin said,

Betwixt the Lake Ontario and Erie’, there is a vast and prodigious Cadence of Water which falls down after a surprizing and astonishing manner, insomuch that the Universe does not afford it's parallel. Tis true, Italy and Suedland boast some such Things; but we may well say they are but soory Patterns, when compar'd to this of which we now speak. At the foot of this horrible Precipice, we meet with the River Niagara, which is not above a quarter of a League broad, but is wonderfully deep in some places. It is so rapid above this Descent, that it violently hurries down the wild Beasts while endeavouring to pass it to feed on the other side, they not being able to withstand the force of its Current, which inevitably casts them above Six hundred foot high… This wonderful Downfal, is compounded of two great Cross-streams of Water, and two Falls, with an Isle sloping along the middle of it. The Waters which fall from this horrible Precipice, do foam and boil after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous Noise, more terrible than that of Thunder; for when the Wind blows out of the South, their dismal roaring may be heard more than Fifteen Leagues off.  

His verbal description can almost be heard coming from the mouths of the men pictured in his drawing. Their astonishment illustrates the sublime language Hennepin used to describe the feeling of being at Niagara. The words “horrible,” “terrible,” “outrageous,” “hideous,” and “dismal” are used to describe the dramatic affects felt near the Falls including the sounds and incredible distance of the various waterfall components. These negative adjectives were used to convey the difference between experiencing Niagara Falls and any other landscape Hennepin and his team had yet seen. The most effective

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38 Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America...Between New-France and New Mexico...with a Continuation, Giving an Account of the Attempts of the Sieur de a Salle Upon the Mines of St.-Barbe*, vol. 2. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).
way to describe how it feels to be in the presence of such a dramatic element of nature is to use words that evoke fear.

This predicament is one inherent to philosopher Immanuel Kant’s concept of the sublime. In defining the elements of nature that can be thought of as being sublime, Kant uses the technique of comparing the elements to beauty and then saying that the sublime can be found in the opposite. He says, “The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it.”\(^{39}\) Regarding limits and limitlessness, Kant believes that the process of aesthetic judgment of the sublime begins with quantification. This means that at the first moment of encountering something that is sublime, the subject reacts in a similar way as she or he would if encountering an art object, that is, contemplating the elements in order to make a judgment. However, in the case of the sublime, there is an inherent negative feeling that begins with the attempt to quantify what one is looking at.

Similar to the language used to describe Niagara Falls are words used in the Bible to describe the power of God over mankind. In Genesis 1:1–31 God creates the earth and all the elements of the landscape—including humans—later punishing those who don’t follow his instructions. For example, when Jacob asked God for forgiveness, and it was given to him on the condition that he and his family abandon false gods and build an altar in the land of Canaan, “the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.”\(^{40}\) Later, when a “horror of great darkness


\(^{40}\) Genesis 35:1–7.
fell upon"\textsuperscript{41} Abram, God lifted it by promising a great portion of land to his heir. In these two examples, God both causes terror and relieves horror, after creating humans, the landscape, and the opportunities to transcend the earthly world into the kingdom of Heaven. Father Hennepin’s description of Niagara employs similar language, suggesting the power of God is contained within the Falls, as they cause terror but also entice astonishment and wonder in their incomparability to other known natural wonders of Europe.

Starting in Father Hennepin’s time and until 1825—when tourist development heightened due to the completion of the Erie Canal—Niagara held a reputation as a “monstrous” place full of “dread” and “terror,"\textsuperscript{42} and attracted only the bravest of travelers, because of its God-like power, and due to the fact that the Falls could only be reached by Indian paths and perilous climbs on the rocky edges of the cataract. The Erie Canal, for which construction began in 1818 and was completed in 1825, greatly improved access to the Falls and allowed more casual travelers to visit from New York City and surrounding areas.\textsuperscript{43} But before the canal was completed, travelers had to make a long journey by carriage from eastern cities that went through rough, mountainous terrain even before arriving at the Falls. In poet and ornithologist Alexander Wilson’s descriptive poem of his 1803 journey to the Falls from his home in West Chester, Pennsylvania he wrote,

\begin{quote}
Here, three long weeks by storms and famine beat,  
With sore bruised backs, and lame and blistered feet,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Genesis 15:12.  
\textsuperscript{42} Alexander Wilson, \textit{The Forester: A Poem, Descriptive of a Pedestrian Journey to the Falls of Niagara in the Autumn of 1804}, (West Chester, PA: Joseph Painter, 1838), 73–79. Of his experience of Horseshoe Falls, Wilson wrote, “The main body of the river rushes over at this place with indescribable violence and uproar.”  
\textsuperscript{43} Black, \textit{Nature and the Environment}, 51.
Here, nameless hardships, griefs and miseries past,  
We find some mill-dam for our pains at last.  

Due to the popularity that the Falls garnered from explorers and artists who braved the wild conditions to get there, people began to complain that travel to sought-after American locales was too difficult. For most, the sublime experience of the Falls was not worth the lack of transportation and amenities offered in the area.  

Ironically, the response to the people’s call for convenience came at a cost to the area’s pristine wilderness, and before long its lack of accessibility disappeared along with the “dreadful” qualities of experiencing it, due to comfortable accommodations, convenient stores, and frequent tourist attractions.

Before the nineteenth century the main reason visitors came to Niagara was its productive and manufacturing potential. As yet, there had not been any more powerful natural forces than Niagara Falls discovered on the American continent. The commercial development of the Niagara area began in 1805 when the state of New York opened up to private interests what had been reserved lands that bordered the Niagara River. The reserved land was broken up into land tracts and auctioned off to anyone with enough money, interested in developing their business near the nation’s most powerful water supply.  

In an 1813 description of the area, Englishman Michael Smith said of its potential,

> It is a beautiful and prospective place, being surrounded on two sides by the water, the lake of the north, and the Niagara river on the east, and which affords a fine harbour

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44 Ibid., 73.  
46 Ibid., 5–7.  
47 Ibid., 10.
for shipping... The village [near Fort George] is a place of much trade, and is inhabited by a civil and industrious people. It contains a council-house, court-house, and a jail, and two houses for public worship... On Both sides of the rapids, above the falls, the banks of the river are quite low, and there are many convenient situations for water works. Several are now erected, yet there is room for more. With small expense, a large quantity of water can be brought in use to do great execution.\textsuperscript{48}

The potential for economic development was important to European countries (in the Niagara area, England and France) because their presence on the American continent had become a great source of income. Because the land in what is now the United States and Canada had was not yet nearly as developed as England and France were, the opportunities for hunting especially helped to propel the fur trade. As early as the late 1600s, Father Hennepin mentioned in his chronicle of North American travels,

\begin{quote}
At the first beginning of the Establishment of the Colony in Canada, the Community gain'd every Year a hundred thousand Crowns, besides the Gains of private Persons. In the Year 1687, this Sum was tripled and above, by the Furs which were sent to France: And tho the Merchants are forc'd to advance further into the Country than at first, it's not-withstanding an inexhaustible Commerce, as we have observed, by the great Discoveries we have made.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

The rapid development Hennepin mentions taking place in Canada in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century was just the beginning of the area’s trade presence. By the time Smith wrote his account of the area in 1813, trade between Europe and North America had grown considerably. In addition to commenting on the potential for water works, Smith also described the areas

\textsuperscript{48} Michael Smith, \textit{A Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada} (Trenton, NJ: Moore and Lake Publishers, 1813), 73–74.

\textsuperscript{49} Hennepin, \textit{A New Discovery}, 358.
of Queenston, Chippeway, Fort Erie, and Port Talbert as places of “considerable trade” and having “fine harbours for shipping.”

But the records left by early explorers such as Jonathan Carver’s *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America, in the Years 1766, 1768, and 1776*, did note the beauty and sublimity of the Falls as a work of nature, rather than just describing it as a port for trade and natural resources. In his report, Carver described the problem with attempting to explain the Falls in words:

> The country around [the Falls] is extremely beautiful. It is not an uninterrupted plain where the eye finds no relief, but composed of many gentle ascents, which in the summer are covered with the finest verdure, and interspersed with little groves, that give a pleasing variety to the prospect. On the whole, when the Falls are included, which may be seen at a distance of four miles, a more pleasing and picturesque view cannot, I believe, be found throughout the universe... I have endeavoured to give the reader as just an idea of this enchanting stop as possible, in the plan annexed; but all description, whether of the pencil or the pen, must fall infinitely short of the original.

Even though the beauty was not lost on visitors, their reason for being there was the explorative interests of their home nations. Carver was visiting North America directly following the French and Indian War, which took place in North America between 1754 and 1763, surveying newly acquired land in what are now Canada and the Northern United States. By the time the Erie Canal was built in 1825, private interests had bought nearly all the land plots sold by the state, and had already begun building stores and mills that initially catered to those visiting for the purpose of trade, but quickly shifted audiences to tourists who had heard about the Falls from published reports from explorers

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52 Ibid.
like Wilson, Smith, and Carver.\textsuperscript{53} These early romantic descriptions of the Falls are the types of reactions to nature that informed Transcendentalism, which wouldn’t be defined for another eighty years but referenced humans’ ongoing desire to spend time in nature.

Niagara Falls Tourism & Representation

Even before visitors could reach the Falls by steamboat via the Erie Canal, they arrived by carriage. While the development of cleared pathways, footbridges, factories, and mills began before large numbers of tourists arrived by steamboat, there was a simultaneous draw to the Falls as a romantic feat of nature, in that they evoked strong feelings that were difficult to explain rationally. Those pushing the development of the area saw no conflict between appreciation of nature and taking advantage of the natural resources in front of them.\textsuperscript{54} This overlap in technology and romantic vision also applied to artists, who were drawn to the Falls for their beauty and the growing accommodations for visitors. The first American artist known to paint Niagara Falls is John Vanderlyn (1775–1852), who did so in 1802.\textsuperscript{55} Vanderlyn painted in the style of European romantic painters Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), but landscape paintings were still not very popular at this time in the United States, in favor of portraits and genre paintings.

Artist Louisa Davis Minot (1788–1858) visited the Falls before most of her Hudson River School contemporaries including Thomas Cole. Along with sketches and

\textsuperscript{53} Irwin, \textit{The New Niagara}, 10.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{55} Hans Huth, \textit{Nature and the American}, 43. Other artists who painted the falls before 1825 include John Trumbull in 1808, Louisa Davis Minot in 1816, Alvan Fisher in 1820, and Edward Hicks in 1825. Artists who painted the Falls after the establishment of the Hudson River School include George Catlin in 1827, Thomas Cole in 1830, John Frederick Kensett in 1851, and Frederic Edwin Church in 1856.
two oil paintings completed two years after her visit, she also contributed a detailed account of her travels in an article published in *The North-American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* in 1816 upon her return to Boston. She maintained that the journey to view the falls was a difficult one saying, “Indeed it should not be by a smooth and secure path, that the enthusiastick [sic] traveler arrives at the Falls of Niagara. His soul must be tuned by danger, obstruction, and novelty of situation, before it can be capable of the pitch to which it ought to be raised by this spectacle.” Minot was experiencing the Niagara Falls region just one year after the War of 1812; the land surrounding the Falls on the American side had not yet been rebuilt, so there were few bridges, pathways, or viewing platforms. This lack of development made it difficult for visitors to comfortably reach the spots with the best views including Goat Island. Minot’s written description of the Falls is as poetic and dramatic as her painting, *Niagara Falls* from 1818, (Fig. 7) in which gives the viewer a low-angle viewpoint of the water crashing into the river below. In her article, she imagines what the recent Battle of Lundy’s Lane must have been like so close to the powerful Falls.

During this night of horror and destruction, the thunder of the cannon was lost in the roar of the torrent, and the earth was shaken, by a mightier force than the discharge of artillery or the trampling of the war horse; and when the battle raged no more, and the mood on the verge of the sky ceased to throw her light on the dismal spectacle, the few who escaped unhurt, listened in vain for the well known

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57 Minot mentions the barrenness of the American shores compared to the Canadian (British) shores due to the destruction of the recent war, “[Fort Niagara], once so flourishing, ornamented with fine houses, and publick [sic] buildings, gardens and orchards, is now a scene of desolation the most complete which the border presents. It is melancholy to think of the unnecessary destruction of this thriving town.” Ibid., 325.
58 The Battle of Lundy’s Lane was fought during the War of 1812 on July 25th, 1814 and was one of the bloodiest battles in the entire war. Richard V. Barbuto, *Niagara 1814: America Invades Canada* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).
voice, which should enable them to distinguish their wounded companions amongst the heaps of slain. That awful stillness, broken only by the low moaning of the wounded and dying, which succeeds the tumult of battle, had here no place. Every sound was confounded in the noise of the torrent, which has for ages passed over the precipice.59

This poetic interpretation of the memory of the landscape was translated into her painting, whose subjects, instead of tired soldiers, are a diverse combination of explorers—white male and female tourists and Native Americans.

Compared to Vanderlyn’s 1802 *A Distant View of Niagara Falls* (Fig. 8), Minot’s *Niagara Falls* reflects more accurately the ideals that Cole would later outline for the Hudson River School aesthetic that became so popular. The major difference between the two paintings is the perspective of the viewer. Vanderlyn’s painting situates the viewer on the shore of the Canadian side, looking down on the two falls—the American Falls on the left and Horseshoe Falls on the right—from the northern distant side of the river, hence the title of the work. Minot’s painting provides the viewer with a completely different perspective of the Falls. Her viewer is located on the lower shores of the American side, viewing both falls from the level of the water on the lower part of the Niagara River, north of the Falls looking south west.

Early written descriptions, woodcuts, and engravings of the Niagara were circulating in periodicals as early as they were being made—Father Hennepin’s drawing was reproduced as a woodcut print within a few years of his return from America. But magazine publications did not start distributing nationally until 1850; up to that time, periodicals were locally circulating in large cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston,

59 Ibid., 327-8.
Chicago, and Cincinnati. When travel descriptions did appear they were generally written—like Minot’s description of the Falls—although occasionally a lithograph of a popular painting would have been reproduced in books and periodicals alongside essays and articles. An example of how these prints were distributed is Horatio A. Parsons' 1835 *A Guide to Travelers Visiting The Falls of Niagara*, which included a number of engravings, one of which was Isaac Weld’s “View of the Falls of Niagara.” (Fig. 9) This particular visitor’s guide was published in Buffalo and would have been distributed mostly in the New York state area. At this time, Niagara was reaching the height of its tourist popularity, so artists knew that they could make money including their work in the guides, and visitors expected the images because of the growing accessibility of Niagara souvenirs like travel guides and postcards. Visitor guides were increasingly popular as more people began to travel outside of their home cities because of the popularity of reading individuals’ travel accounts. Instead of just relying on magazines and newspapers to publish these descriptions of travel adventures, publishers began distributing volumes solely dedicated to encouraging travelers to visit specific places. In addition to maps and written descriptions of the area, Parsons’ guide included engravings with the purpose of *showing* the reader the magnificent wonders of the Falls. Weld’s depiction of Niagara Falls prescribes to the popular Hudson River School aesthetic by allotting the majority of the picture plane to the sky and cloud formations. The right side of the image shows rocky crags and multiple species of trees leading the eye into the distance, where the Falls can be seen in their complete form. Unlike Minot’s, Weld’s view does not situate the

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61 The two most popular illustrated periodicals in the 19th century were Leslie’s Weekly and Harper’s Weekly, both of which were established in the mid-1850s. Ibid., 65.
62 Ibid., 52.
viewer below the Falls, causing a feeling of sublime danger. Instead, Weld’s viewers are placed behind two figures who stand on solid ground opposite and a safe distance from the crashing waterfalls, which are quite small in scale compared to the trees and rock formations that lean towards the figures in the foreground. Nonetheless, Weld’s image of Niagara Falls describes a location of natural beauty that includes a section of unoccupied space next to the figures in the foreground, suggesting the viewer could stand there and see the view for him or herself.

Once the Erie Canal was open for business, people started traveling to the Falls in masses because the time and effort of travel had significantly decreased.\(^{63}\) Accessibility to the best viewpoints improved due to the creation of stairways, bridges, and covered paths. By 1830 the land surrounding the Falls included a number of hotels, restaurants, roads, bridges, and factories.\(^{64}\) The more “improvements” were made, the more tourists traveled to the site, proving that comfort and convenience outweighed untouched nature.

The travel reports of visitors changed dramatically over the course of a decade. In a step-by-step guide to visiting the Falls published in 1836, one writer described in detail the best way to take advantage of everything the budding tourist destination had to offer:

> In crossing the river, not the least danger need be apprehended; it is a perfectly safe and most delightful excursion, and persons sometimes swim across and find it a real luxury. The time occupied in crossing is ordinarily about eight minutes, and the ferriage is 18 3/4 cents from May to November, and 25 cents from November to May. If you have trunks or other luggage to be transported from either side to the other, the ferrymen will convey them safely at a reasonable charge... Having crossed the river, proceed up the bank by a carriage road, to Fido's elegant and inviting confectionery establishment, where, if you choose, you can refresh yourself with ice cream and other

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\(^{64}\) Irwin, *The New Niagara*, 10.
luxuries,—and thence to Table Rock, where you will find a spiral staircase, from the foot of which you can pass 153 feet behind the sheet of water. This staircase is under the care of Mr. Starkey, who furnishes dresses and a guide for visiter [sic], who wish to go behind the sheet; he also keeps a reading room and a neat and inviting shop of refreshments. 

Between the ferrymen, Fido’s confectionery establishment, and Mr. Starkey’s shop of refreshments, there was little need for a traveler to bear the natural and wild elements of the Falls. The addition of stairways and ferry boats was instrumental in increasing the area’s tourism because the best views of the Falls were until then only accessible by climbing dangerous rocks, something that was especially difficult for casual travelers who were not trained in rock climbing, largely including women and children.

The increased comfort and popularity of the Falls came at a cost. With no environmental preservation and little economic regulations, tourist development at the Falls began to outweigh the very idea of experiencing the natural wonder in all its glory. The magazine articles and sublime paintings encouraged an ideal experience that visitors were no longer able to achieve because of all the development in the area. When American author Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) visited the Falls in 1834 he had a hard time taking in the view without all the build-up he was previously exposed to,

Blessed were the wanderers of old, who heard its deep roar, sounding through the woods, as the summons to an unknown wonder, and approached its awful brink, in all the freshness of native feeling. Had its own mysterious voice been the first to warn me of its existence, then, indeed, I might have knelt down and worshipped.

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Hawthorne might as well have been talking about Alexander Wilson and his party who did, indeed, shake “as with horror at th’ o’erwhelming sound!”\textsuperscript{67} Hawthorne went on to describe the reactions of other travelers he observed while standing at an observation deck,

A short, ruddy, middle-aged gentleman, fresh from old England, peeped over the rock, and evinced his approbation by a broad grin. His spouse, a very robust lady, afforded a sweet example of maternal solicitude, being so intent on the safety of her little boy that she did not even glance at Niagara. As for the child, he gave himself wholly to the enjoyment of a stick of candy. Another traveler, a native American, and no rare character among us, produced a volume of captain Hall's tour, and labored earnestly to adjust Niagara to the captain's description, departing, at last, without one new idea or sensation of his own.\textsuperscript{68}

While published images and tourist guides continued to enthusiastically promote the wonders of Niagara, Hawthorne was not alone in his criticism. One such tourist guide, published in 1845 boasted: “Nature has many waterfalls, a few cataracts—ONE Niagara! That stands alone, vast, grand, indescribable! — the mighty alembic in which the world of waters is refined and etherealized!”\textsuperscript{69} In contrast, accounts published by those who visited the Falls had a difficult time sharing the same grand comparisons. One traveler lamented:

When I came within six miles of the Falls I heard the roaring of the cataract, which impressed me with feelings of awe, when I thought of the mighty spectacle I was so soon to behold. I took up my lodgings at the National Hotel, kept by Mr Slater, and then sallied forth to contemplate the scene. I had a quarter of a mile to walk before I reached the Falls. They burst upon my sight as soon as I reached a

\textsuperscript{67} Wilson, \textit{The Forrester}, 104.
\textsuperscript{68} Hawthorne, “My Visit to Niagara,” 95.
certain point of the road; and although they were very grand, they did not nearly embody the descriptions I had read of them. I had heard them compared to a sea descending from the moon, which simile is certainly overstretched.\footnote{E. Burton, \textit{Journal of a Wanderer: Being a Residence in India, and Six Weeks in North America} (London: Simpkin, Marshall, \& Co., 1844) 169–170.}

Published a year apart, the individual travel account directly contradicts the tourist guide’s lavish description of the Falls. The description that was marketed to potential tourists exaggerated claims so greatly that when people did come, their experience didn’t meet their expectation.

Even before the second half of the 19th century, there was a major difference between the Hudson River School’s representations of the Falls and the Falls themselves. As early as 1830, Thomas Cole, the father of the movement, depicted the Falls in his \textit{Distant View of Niagara Falls} (Fig. 10) without any trace of human intervention, save a few travelers innocently looking over the edge. The only humans whose basic identity the viewer can make out are the two Native American figured on a ledge in the foreground, in full native dress, looking at the Falls across the river.

Because of the increased traffic in the area, by 1830 there were pathways, railings, and viewing stations built for convenience. Although the Terrapin Tower, a large lighthouse structure wasn’t built for three more years, its ultimate location, which would be on the land mass between the two falls (Goat Island) almost in the center of Cole’s painting, was still a popular spot that in 1830 had a boardwalk and railings for safe tourist viewing. Also, according to one visitor’s account, on the Canadian side of the Falls—which in Cole’s picture is the land mass on the right side of the picture plane, that extends into the background—there was a small building at the overlook where one can barely
see two figures in the middle ground (the sight-seeing spot known as Table Rock) atop a spiral staircase the led visitors on a guided tour behind the falls. This visitor also describes a “rudely constructed bridge from Goat Island,” which is the little piece of land (it’s actually larger than Cole depicts it) between the two falls. (Fig. 11) This bridge would have connected Goat Island with a series of rocks overhanging Horseshoe Falls. None of these human constructions are shown in Cole’s depiction, and in fact, both the American and Canadian shores are not even cleared of trees and wild brush, creating an untouched natural landscape beneath a glowing sunset.

Twenty-seven years later, Cole’s most notable student—and one of the most well-known of the Hudson River School painters—Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) tried his hand at painting the most famous natural wonder in the United States. His 1857 painting simply titled, *Niagara* (Fig. 12) is perhaps the most famous depiction of the Falls and provides the viewer with a unique viewpoint which highlights the edge of Horseshoe Falls, where the water rushes over the cliff and disappears into a sea of mist down below. Church’s viewer seems to be located in the Niagara River, above the Falls, amidst the active water that is violently drawn to the edge of the cliff. This perspective is due to the fact that only water and select slippery rocks below it are shown in the foreground, as opposed to all the other depictions of Niagara discussed here, which place the viewer in the foreground on solid, dry land. Church’s actual location on land is Table Rock, on the Canadian Side of Horseshoe Falls.

By painting Niagara in this way, Church maintained his position as a proponent of the Hudson River School’s Grand Style. Unlike Cole’s traditional Hudson River School

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composition of central active focus (such as a waterfall) surrounded by a combination of trees, rocks, and dramatic sky, Church’s canvas is filled with practically only two elements: water and sky. The detail with which he painted the fewer elements is unwavering and does not stray from traditional Hudson River School technique. However, Church did not paint threatening thunderclouds looming over the scene, but instead reserved all the drama for the Falls themselves, which are framed as though at any moment they could sweep the viewer into the current and over the edge. Church’s depiction of the Falls is more sublime than any of his precursors’ because of the lack of dry land in the foreground, the viewer’s low angle, and the ratio of water to land in the entire picture plane. Also taking into consideration the fact that Niagara is quite a bit larger than other artists’ depictions of the Falls, these elements create a reaction in the viewer that Kant described as the mathematical sublime.\(^{72}\) The mathematical sublime is defined as that which is absolutely great and beyond all comparison. It has to do with magnitude and quantification—the inability of the subject to quantify such great (absolute) magnitude. Kant argues that the sublime resides in the subject not the object, meaning the sublime cannot be found in nature itself, but only in our reaction to it. By using compositional strategies like omitting the shoreline, and only including dry land in the far background, unattainable from where the viewer stands, Church created a “great picture” imbued with the Kantian mathematical sublime.\(^{73}\)

\(^{72}\) Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 144.

\(^{73}\) “Great Picture” was a contemporary British term that referred to large paintings that were displayed for public exhibition. The term became popular to describe very large, dramatic landscape paintings by the second generation of Hudson River School artists including Church and his peers Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, among others. Gerald L. Carr, “Albert Bierstadt, big trees, and the British: a log of many Anglo-American ties,” *Arts Magazine* 60 (June 1986): 60-71.
Even though, in *Niagara*, the far away Terrapin Tower can be seen on the near shore of Goat Island on the left side of the picture, Church purposely chose to compose the landscape so that the tower was a very small, hardly noticeable element compared to the bright white, roaring falls over which it perches. The inclusion of human figures or elements that suggest human life is a technique used by Hudson River School artists to increase in the viewer the sense of the sublime landscape and the inconsequential size of humans in relation to nature. The use of this technique when representing Niagara Falls in the late 1850s makes an especially potent statement. The actual experience of the Falls was so exaggerated in the minds of those who hadn’t yet visited, that when they did, the barrage of hotels, factories, stores, and attractions proved the experience to be a let-down. By painting a picture of the Falls as a pure, strong, and overwhelming force of nature that completely outweighs the human presence, Church presented what people wanted the Falls to be, what they once were but could not return to.

**Niagara Falls: a Model for Yellowstone**

Because Niagara Falls had gone through its own struggles with commercial interests, Yellowstone was able to emerge as the nation’s new promise for natural perfection; the world’s first National Park. The government’s creation of new law to protect Yellowstone intersects with Emerson’s Transcendentalist assertion that landowners do not actually “own” the landscape, in that public accessibility to view and appreciate the landscape is only possible in the absence of private ownership. Thanks to the help of surveyors and government officials like Mark Dunnell (1823–1904) and Senator Samuel Pomeroy (1816–1891), both of whom presented findings from official surveys into Yellowstone and warned against Yellowstone becoming another Niagara, Congress acted
to prevent any one person from claiming ownership, allowing the land to be owned collectively by the nation’s citizens. With this new legislative precedent, viewers of the Hudson River School images made of Yellowstone were not only able to imagine themselves in the landscape—taking on the roles of the adventurous explorers the artist included in the pictures—but once the railroad was built to take them there, they were also able to actually visit the landscape, which existed on land specifically reserved for them and was now freely accessible to everyone.
Chapter Two: Yosemite

Only eight years after the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove were set aside by the Federal government under the control of the state of California for public use and enjoyment, Yellowstone National Park was established as the first of its kind in the world. It was no coincidence that these two areas became parks within ten years of each other due to the efforts of artists, photographers, journalists, Congressmen, and others who helped publicize and protect the two western wonderlands. Without the promotion, tourist development, and legislation that Yosemite underwent in the early 1860s, Yellowstone would not have become the world’s first National Park in 1872 for lack of precedent. The artists involved with the development and ultimate protection of Yosemite include Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), Carleton E. Watkins (1829–1916), Edweard Muybridge (1830–1904), Thomas Hill (1829–1908), and William Keith (1838–1911), among others. These artists accompanied expeditions of prospectors, entrepreneurs, and government surveyors on journeys into the western mountains to assist their team members in documenting the surveyed land and to further their own careers by producing paintings, drawings, and photographs to exhibit to the public back home.

The relationship between artists and the development of the western landscape generates many questions including: what effects did these images have on the growth of tourism and the non-native presence at Yosemite? How did the federal government react differently to the development of tourism at Yosemite than it did to that at Niagara? How did the images from the early western expeditions contribute to a model of land protection to be used later for the Yellowstone area? By examining published images and

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74 An Act Authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the “Yo-Semite Valley,” and of the Land Embracing the “Maripossa Big Tree Grove,” Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325).
written accounts describing the surveyed regions, I will explore these questions, and argue for Yosemite’s role as a model for land protection on which Yellowstone National Park was based.

As Niagara Falls could no longer provide artists and visitors with a seemingly untouched wilderness due its commercial development, artists began to travel into the western territories to fulfill the public’s desire for American landscapes. It was under those circumstances that Albert Bierstadt’s Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California from 1865 (Fig. 13) was completed, just one year after the federal government protected the area for public enjoyment. The painting, which was the first of its size (64 x 93 inches) to show the Yosemite Valley shares the same compositional organization as Thomas Moran’s 1872 painting, The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Both of these Great Pictures were painted during the crescendo of the artists’ careers, and both were completed following journeys into the western territories. Like Moran’s, Bierstadt’s painting of Yosemite Valley depicts visitors in the lower left corner of the picture plane enjoying the view. The central focus of both images is a natural feature in the center of the image, which in Looking Down Yosemite Valley’s case is the glowing sun setting behind the Half Dome peak looking over the valley. Both artists chose to use the landscapes’ dramatic cliffs and tall trees to frame the deep basins that occupy both canvases’ middle ground. The paintings, which were completed fewer than ten years apart, both provide viewers with the western landscape experience in the form of a painting, and simultaneously call on viewers to come see for themselves the transcendent powers of the western mountains of America.

76 The Yosemite Valley Park Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in June of 1864. The Yosemite Valley Park Act, Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325).
The main difference between the two paintings is that Moran’s viewer looks upon the landscape from a higher perspective than Bierstadt’s. Partly, this is because Bierstadt was highlighting the dramatic distance between Yosemite’s valley floor and its highest rocky peaks. But the perspectives also represent the different levels of knowledge and understanding of both areas of land being explored and the processes by which they were protected. In Bierstadt’s portrayal of the Yosemite Valley, the viewer is standing at ground level, looking up at the majestic Cathedral Rocks and El Capitán formations (Fig. 14). In contrast, Moran’s painting of Yellowstone’s Grand Canyon positions the viewer at the same height as the top of the waterfall, overlooking the valley from the perspective of some of the highest peaks.

History & Early Explorations of Yosemite

The discovery of Yosemite by new California settlers occurred by accident when a group called the Mariposa Battalion was nearby stationed at a gold mining site in the surrounding Sierra Nevada Mountains. They ventured away from the site on a quest to drive out Native American inhabitants so they could expand their search for gold. Instead, what they found was the Yosemite Valley. The state of California’s protection of Yosemite happened somewhat preemptively, before the government had a chance to properly survey it in order to keep private interests from staking claim to the land and charging fees to tourists. In a letter to Senator John Conness (1821–1909) from Israel Ward Raymond (1811–1887), who was the California state representative of the Central American Steamship Transit Company of New York, interested in expanding the possibilities of railroad travel, Raymond stated,

It will be many years before it is worth while for the government to survey these mountains. But I think it important to obtain the proprietorship soon, to prevent occupation and especially to preserve the trees in the valley from destruction and that it may be accepted by the legislation at its present session and laws passed to give the Commissioners power to take control and begin to consider and lay out their plans for the gradual improvement of the properties.  

For Raymond, the prevention of individuals occupying Yosemite meant that there would be a greater audience for the railroads that would ultimately reach the valley. The fact that Conness took Raymond’s advice and presented the idea of protection to Congress, allowed Yellowstone a precedent for its own land protection. Because of this, the United States Department of the Interior was able to send the largest government-funded survey team into the area to determine what use the government might have for it. The result of that survey was a report calling for the creation of a National Park.

The area protected at Yosemite covers 44 square miles, which is small compared to the 3,500 square miles protected at Yellowstone. Both the Yosemite Park Act of 1864 and the Yellowstone Act of 1872 begin with a definition of the geography of that which was protected, followed by a declaration that the area will be preserved for public use. In the Yosemite Act, it is stated in the end of the first sentence that the valley and Mariposa Grove “shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation.” The wording of this law was unprecedented as an act to protect land for the purpose of pleasure. While legislature that called for the protection of land had been established before the Yosemite Act, none were purely for public enjoyment. As early as 1681, British colonial policy

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78 Israel Ward Raymond to Senator John Conness, February 20, 1864.
79 This report was Ferdinand V. Hayden’s Report to the Committee on the Public Lands.
80 Runte, National Parks, 29.
81 An Act Authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the “Yo-Semite Valley,” and of the Land Embracing the “Maripossa Big Tree Grove,” Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325).
established laws to protect forests—but for the purpose of preserving economic resources. One law declared by William Penn (the namesake of Pennsylvania) required five acres of land be preserved for every five deforested; 82 another required surveyors to mark large trees that were suitable for ship masts, in order to protect them from being cleared. 83 Two hundred years later in 1820, the Arkansas Territorial Legislature proposed that the Hot Springs in Arkansas be reserved because of the health benefits it offered. The U.S. government agreed and in 1832, President Andrew Jackson set the area aside under the control of the federal government for the sole purpose of providing health benefits to the nation’s citizens. 84 These important predecessors of the Yosemite and Yellowstone Acts show that while the U.S. government (and its predecessor, the British government) have been concerned with environmental protection for hundreds of years, it was not until the Yosemite Act in 1864 that land was protected for the sole purpose of pleasure without the intention of gardening or landscape design.

Both acts describe the treatment of individuals dwelling in the area, the inclusion of which immediately eliminated the possibility of either area succumbing to the fate of Niagara. The Yosemite Act clearly states that while leases of the land may be granted to non-government groups or individuals, the “income derived from leases of privileges [are] to be expended in the preservation and improvement of the property, or the roads leading thereto.” 85 Meaning, if one is granted a lease of the area, the profit made from whatever service one might be offering must go towards the preservation of the area.

85 An Act Authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the “Yo-Semite Valley,” and of the Land Embracing the “Maripossa Big Tree Grove,” Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325).
instead of for individual profit. Even though this inclusion in the Act worked towards avoiding a commercial takeover of Yosemite, it still left room for “improvement,” meaning the possibility of tourist amenities developed by individuals who were approved a lease of occupancy was likely.

The wording used to describe this possibility of land leases didn’t address the issue of people who had already “claimed” land in the area. Sure enough, this omission caused conflict after Yosemite was protected, and the issue was reflected upon when Congress was discussing the protection of Yellowstone. Illinois Senator Lyman Turkull stated, “There is the wonderful Yosemite Valley which one or two persons are now claiming by virtue of preemption.” Speaking of protecting Yellowstone, he continued,

> It is possible that some person may go there and plant himself right across the only path that leads to these wonders, and charge every man that passes along between the gorges of these mountains a fee of a dollar or five dollars… We did set apart the region of country on which the mammoth trees grow in California, and the Yosemite valley also we have undertaken to reserve, but there is a dispute about it. Now, before there is any dispute as to this wonderful country, I hope we shall except it from the general disposition of the public lands, and reserve it to the Government.\(^{86}\)

Not only does this comment indicate that Congress had made a mistake by not addressing individuals who had already claimed land at Yosemite, but also that in 1872, Congress viewed the protection of Yosemite as a model for that of Yellowstone. The two areas were both protected for the same reason (public enjoyment) and therefore, lawmakers reflected on the mistakes of Yosemite in order to improve upon the process of government land protection.

\(^{86}\) *Congressional Globe*, (January 30, 1872): 697.
In response to what was learned from the problem of squatters in Yosemite, the Yellowstone Act took individual ownership a step further by stating in the very first sentence that the area

…is hereby reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the law of the United States… and all persons who shall locate or settle upon or occupy the same, or any part thereof, except as hereinafter provided, shall be considered trespassers and removed therefrom.  

By forbidding all occupancy and stating that anyone who disobeys the act will be considered a trespasser, the law doesn’t even provide the possibility of non-government businesses to reside in the protected area. This passage also indicates that because the area is under the ownership and protection of the government, anyone else (“except as hereinafter provided”) will be removed, meaning if there were squatters already claiming land there, they had no legal right to it. Lawmakers in 1872 would have never proposed so bold a claim without the Yosemite Act serving as a model for government-run land protection, and as a step between no regulation of independent interests and the preservation from independent interests.

Exploring the West: Surveys & Early Representations

Around the time when the Yosemite Act was passed into law, nature writing, landscape art, and scientific studies were being reproduced in popular magazines. Also scientists were completing groundbreaking studies in natural science, including Darwin’s Theory of

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87 *The Yellowstone Act*, 1872.
88 Native Americans were not included in the wording of the act because the lawmakers believed that their cultures were already dying, and therefore they should be removed so that new settlers from the eastern states could take over their land. Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze*, 18.
The popularity of scientific topics such as geology and botany in the mid-to-late 1800s aligned with the popular theory of Transcendentalism, defined thirty years earlier by Ralph Waldo Emerson as experiencing nature for the purpose of transcending the material world and becoming closer to God. Although written earlier, in 1836, Emerson stated in his essay *Nature* that humans could achieve this type of transcendence by spending time in the wild—areas that had not been altered by humans. At a time when the country was rapidly expanding into the previously unpopulated western territories, the increasing number of travelers and settlers, which even in 1836, was a growing concern for Emerson and the natural areas he championed.

In his essay he wrote of humanity’s relationship to nature as one concerned with science,

> Here again we are impressed and even daunted by the immense Universe to be explored. 'What we know, is a point to what we do not know.' Open any recent journal of science, and weigh the problems suggested concerning Light, Heat, Electricity, Magnetism, Physiology, Geology, and judge whether the interest of natural science is likely to be exhausted... Nor has science sufficient humanity, so long as the naturalist overlooks that wonderful congruity which subsists between man and the world; of which he is lord, not because he is the most subtle inhabitant, but because he is its head and heart, and finds something of himself in every great and small thing, in every mountain stratum, in every new law of color, fact of astronomy, or atmospheric influence which observation or analysis lay open. 

What Emerson meant by this is that science is useful to humans because through it, one is able to recognize oneself in all things due to the invisible connection between humans

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90 Emerson, *Nature*.
91 Emerson, *Nature*, 84.
and nature. By researching and exploring the natural sciences, one is able to learn about
the human condition; in this way science is beneficial. However he offered a caveat,

But the best read naturalist who lends an entire and devout attention to truth, will see that there remains much to learn of his relation to the world, and that it is not to be learned by any addition or subtraction or other comparison of known quantities, but is arrived at by untaught sallies of the spirit, by a continual self-recovery, and by entire humility. He will perceive that there are far more excellent qualities in the student than preciseness and infallibility; that a guess is often more fruitful than an indisputable affirmation, and that a dream may let us deeper into the secret of nature than a hundred concerted experiments.  

In other words, despite the benefits science offers in aid of self-discovery, it cannot provide an answer for everything. This passage is in support of his main argument throughout the essay—that contact with nature is the most direct path to wisdom, and to God.

Hudson River School artists were also interested in the natural sciences—geology especially—because of the detail with which they painted the natural elements in their paintings of mountains, valleys, and rock formations. The studies of art and science overlapped in the nineteenth century more so than today; scientists and artists shared ideas and practices and were well educated in both fields. For example, Thomas Cole had a large rock and mineral collection, and his student (and leader of the second generation Hudson River School) Frederic Edwin Church was a member of the American Geographical and Statistical Society in New York. Conversely, geologists James T.

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92 Ibid., 82–3.
Gardner (1842–1912) and Clarence King (1842–1901) were members of the American Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art.\textsuperscript{94}

Scientific expeditions into the western territories became a popular way to practice the advancement of both fields because artists wanted new subject matter and explorers wanted to know the possibilities of the yet unclaimed land. As art historian Rebecca Bedell stated,

To the pragmatically inclined, the study of geology also provided practical economic benefits. Here in the United States, with vast tracts of territory still unexplored and unexploited, an intrepid entrepreneur armed with appropriate geologic knowledge could hope to earn a healthy return on his intellectual investment. Untold geologic riches were waiting to be tapped by those with the right information. This was one case in which knowledge could literally be turned into gold—or diamonds or coal or zinc. At least a few of those who packed the lecture halls to hear learned discourses on geology must have arrived with visions of nuggets dancing in their heads.\textsuperscript{95}

In this passage, Bedell indicated that people interested in the “unexploited” land in the West—entrepreneurs, prospectors, explorers—had a better chance of profit if they already obtained scientific knowledge relevant to the land. Because the American West is predominantly made up of mountainous geography, geology and other earth sciences were extremely popular. By sending (and often accompanying) teams out into the unexplored territories, expedition funders got in return an idea of where they could develop railroads and start businesses, and images that showed the most ideal visions of

\textsuperscript{94} The American Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art was an organization of pre-Raphaelite painters, not seekers of the sort of “ideal” truth Thomas Cole argued for in landscape painting. The geologists participation in the association proves that scientists were interested and actively involved in the art world; that the two overlapped. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 6.
The combination of these two pieces of information equaled profit for many Americans. Individuals who led survey teams into the western territories included people with a wide range of interests including figures like James Mason Hutchings (1820–1902) and Fitz Hugh Ludlow (1836–1870), who were writers looking to have travel accounts published; Josiah D. Whitney (1819–1896), who was named the leading geologist of the California Geological Survey and led a number of expeditions funded by government money.97

Starting primarily in the 1850s, when those who were interested in expanding into the seemingly endless resources of the American West sent geologists to take notes, they also sent artists along with them to both document and promote the newfound landscapes with their popular paintings. Hudson River School artists were great candidates to accompany surveys because inherent in their painting style was illusionistic depictions of nature. This was beneficial for the funders of the expeditions because they not only got a realistic idea of what the land looked like, but they were also then able to take advantage of the popularity of Hudson River School landscapes by increasing the visibility of the land they hoped to develop. This was the reasoning behind writer, pioneer, and prospector James Mason Hutchings’ inclusion of artist Thomas A. Ayres (1816–1858) in his expedition to the Yosemite Valley in 1855, and also the reason Ferdinand V. Hayden (1829–1887) included artist Thomas Moran on his expedition to Yellowstone seventeen years later.98

96 One such geologist who included artists in his survey was Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden, who lead the largest survey into Yellowstone in 1871. Merrill, Yellowstone and the Great West, 4. 97 Runte, National Parks: The American Experience (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, Press, 1997). 98 H.J. Taylor, Yosemite Indians and Other Sketches (San Francisco: Johnck & Seeger, 1936) 2; Alfred Runte, National Parks: The American Experience (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010, fourth edition) 34.
As the only artist to accompany Hutchings on his trip to Yosemite in 1855, Thomas A. Ayres drew the first published image of Yosemite Valley.\(^9\) Ayres accompanied Hutchings and four others on a trip into the “Yo-ham-i-te” Valley to explore the area so Hutchings could publish information about it in the magazine he was planning to create.\(^1\) From its inception, this expedition was explorative in nature and meant to promote the wonders of the area to the public. The area surrounding Yosemite Valley was already home to a few full-time residents who housed travelers, as well as silver and gold mining projects that were established in the Sierra Nevada mountain range as early as 1849, after the first report of gold found the previous year in Coloma, California (approximately 150 miles northwest of the Yosemite Valley).\(^1\) While other small tourist groups had traveled to the area, Hutchings’s team was the first to come fully prepared to publicize the area through published written and visual descriptions.\(^2\) Upon returning from the 1855 trip, Ayres immediately planned to return the following year, the results of which were more drawings and an article of his experience published in the *Daily Alta California*.\(^3\)

Though the images Ayres produced were black and white drawings reproduced in magazines as wood engravings, they exposed to the public the yet unseen Yosemite

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\(^1\) H.J. Taylor, *Yosemite Indians and Other Sketches* (San Francisco: Johnck & Seeger, 1936) 2. The first issue of this publication was where Ayres’s engravings of Yosemite were first published, “The Yo-ham-i-te Valley, and its Waterfalls,” *Hutchings’ California Magazine* 1, no. 1 (July, 1856): 2–8.


Thomas A. Ayres, “A Trip to the Yohamite Valley,” *Daily Alta California* 7, no. 207 (August 6, 1856).
Valley. On his first trip to the valley in 1855, Ayres produced five drawings that became the public’s visual introduction to the area. The first image was published on June 27, 1855 in *California Monthly*. In this print, the valley floor is a major part of Ayres’s composition; it’s divided horizontally by a line of dark trees to create an active foreground and a wide-open middle ground that comes between the valley’s two major geological features—El Capitan (left) and Half Dome (right). In the foreground horses graze and humans rest next to a campfire, perhaps a representation of the artist’s own team. While the horses are easily distinguished from their surroundings, the humans, who share the verticality and girth of the trees around them, would be difficult to point out if not for the billowing smoke in front of which they stand.

The stark tonal contrast between the smoke and the human’s silhouettes draws the viewer’s eye to the middle-right area of the foreground just enough to notice the human presence, but not enough to distract from the real subject, the rock formations surrounding the valley. The drawing is a wide view of the Yosemite Valley with El Capitan’s vertical rock wall occupying the left portion of the middle ground, and Bridalveil Falls across the basin on right side of the middle ground, Half Dome peeking up behind it. Ayres framed the view not only with large rock formations but also with large trees on both sides of the foreground, which dwarf the human visitors, indicating the small mark their presence leaves on such a bountiful portion of land.

Alongside Ayres’ illustrations were Hutchings’ poetic descriptions of the California area, including romantic descriptions such as this one:

> Among the most remarkable may be classed the Yo-Ham-i-te Valley—surrounded as it is by lofty granite mountains,

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exceeding three thousand feet in height, of the most fantastic slopes; now in appearance like a vast projecting tower; now standing boldly out like an immense chimney or column; then, like two giant domes; yonder, a water-fall of two thousand five hundred feet; and, as it rolls over the edge of the precipice, its quivering spray is gilded with the colors of the rainbow, when the sun-light falls upon it.\textsuperscript{105}

The engravings provided a pleasing composition of the elements that were described in further detail with words. The way in which Hutchings described the Yosemite landscape is similar to the way Hudson River School painters would paint it, but since Ayres was producing images to be mechanically reproduced in a magazine, he was not able to use the color or illusionistic detail that oil paint allows.

Ayres’ depictions of the Yosemite Valley have in common with Hudson River School paintings elements of compositions, dramatic effect, and use of figures to show scale—elements which, when used together in a painting create works of art that, in the words of Thomas Cole, “sublime and purify thought, by grasping the past, the present, and the future—[and] give the mind a foretaste of its immortality, and thus prepare it for performing an exalted part amid the realities of life.”\textsuperscript{106} This dramatic description of the effect of landscape paintings can, to a point, be applied to the engravings of the same subject matter, but the two mediums were presented to different audiences, and for different reasons. Landscape oil paintings, especially the large, great pictures were made for the purpose of public exhibition, while engravings like the Ayres’ were made primarily to accompany text as an illustration.

Even if the people who enjoyed viewing the great landscape pictures also enjoyed the small landscape illustrations (they were the same subject matter, after all), the ways in


which they viewed the two mediums were different. Paintings viewed in salons and
galleries were meant for many people at once to see. Galleries would fill up—the most
popular paintings causing people to be turned away for lack of standing space—as people
came to see the newest works from the most famous painters of the day.\textsuperscript{107} Magazines, in
contrast, are designed for the individual. Originally all periodicals were published
without images, just article text presented as a booklet or a newspaper. In the early part of
the nineteenth century, magazines and newspapers began to print one or two images to
accompany the text, as an illustration of what was being described.\textsuperscript{108} The oil paintings
presented to groups of the public an entire story or idea; color, brushstroke, massive size,
and multiple actions contained within one image contributing to this purpose. Magazine
engravings like Ayres’—ones that showed elements of a landscape that most of the
magazine’s audience had not yet seen—were intended as a visual companion to the
written description, as evidence of the writers’ claims.

The two articles which featured Ayres’s drawings—Hutchings’s description of
the first trip and Ayres’s description of his second—ended up being published only a
month apart, which proved to be great publicity for the artist. The drawings were so well
received that in 1857 his Yosemite drawings were exhibited at the Art Union, an
exhibition hall in New York.\textsuperscript{109} Seeing the popularity of the “sublimely beautiful”
Yosemite Valley, \textit{Harper’s Weekly} approached Ayres to illustrate yet more descriptions
of California’s natural wonders.\textsuperscript{110} In the fall of 1855, another travel account of Yosemite

\textsuperscript{107} Barbara Babcock Millhouse, \textit{American Wilderness: The Story of the Hudson River School of Painting}
\textsuperscript{108} Hoornstra and Heath, \textit{American Periodicals}, 12.
\textsuperscript{109} Jeanne Van Nostrand, "Thomas A. Ayres: Artist-Argonaut of California," \textit{California Historical Society
\textsuperscript{110} Thomas A. Ayres, “A Trip to the Yohamite Valley,” \textit{Daily Alta California} 7, no. 207 (August 6, 1856).
was published; this time in the *Mariposa Gazette*, and accompanied by another engraving by Ayres depicting Yosemite Falls. (Fig. 16) The same article was reprinted just days later in yet another magazine, the Stockton *San Joaquin Republican*, allowing descriptions of the area to reach wider audiences.\(^{111}\)

Like Ayres’s first view of the Yosemite Valley, his engraving of the Yosemite Falls also includes very small figures in the foreground. The people in the scene enjoy the shade from a cluster of trees, and look on as their horses graze in the valley basin. The image is divided in half vertically by the multi-tiered waterfall that crashes in a burst of white at the edge of the basin, behind a line of trees. While this image also uses tonal contrast to draw focus to both the figures in the foreground and the falls in the middle and background, it employs a different perspective—one that pulls the viewer into a more sublime experience by situating the viewer in the valley basin, close enough to the cliffs so that only a small triangle of sky is visible above the peaks. Approximately one third of the picture plane is dedicated to the valley floor, while the remaining two thirds contain multiple levels of rock formations that tower imposingly over the valley and its human and animal inhabitants. Instead of providing the viewer with a quiet composition made up equally of valley floor, valley walls, and temperate skies, Ayres gives the viewer a more dramatic view that is centered on the action of the crashing waterfall and the dominating valley walls rising up around it. This image and the first were extremely important because not only were they first images the public saw of the valley, but also they were

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\(^{111}\) The two publications mentioned, the *Mariposa Gazette* and Stockton’s *San Joaquin Republican*, along with Hutching’s *California Monthly* and the periodical that first published Ayres’s account of the area, the *California Daily Alta*, were distributed almost exclusively in California, and reached other locations on the west coast via individual travel. It was not until the late 1860s that magazines began distributing nationally, so it is unlikely that any significant number of these publications reached the east coast. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741–1850* vol. 1. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 5th edition, 1970 originally published in 1930).
distributed as prints, so they were able to reach more people than if they had been paintings.

Accompanying Ayres’s engraving of Yosemite Falls was a typical narrative of a travel group’s journey into the valley complete with visual description, inventory of natural resources ("Fine timber for building or husbandry is abundant."\textsuperscript{112}) and even commentary on human impulses when faced with such raw nature. Of this conflict, the author wrote,

\begin{quote}
Nature made the lovely spot, and kept from it the “dross” which alone induces man to despoil. Embowered in the mountains in its wildness and beauty, it seems desecration for civilization to intrude upon its loveliness. Even the poor Digger Indian, with all his apathy and ignorance, shows his love for the spot the “Great Spirit” has made so lovely, and hallowed as the hunting ground of his forefathers. But the restless Anglo Saxon, or rather “inquisitive” Yankee, in his onward career espies it, visits it, and squats upon it and “reckons as how it’ll prove a speculation.” Nature’s beauties are nothing to him. That noble pine falls beneath his ax; soil which bears flowers in such profusion is upturned; and that cascade which reveals in the rainbow; and leaps with joyousness from cliff to cliff, must be perverted into the power which turns his mill to grind out his “notions.”\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

It is evident in this excerpt that the author was aware of the cultural dichotomy regarding the treatment of nature. His pairing of grandiloquent descriptions with sharp verbs such as the “soil which bears flowers” being “upturned,” and most disturbingly, the “cascade which reveals the rainbow; and leaps with joyousness” being “perverted” by the production of mills for water power. This type of reflection proves that the conflict of

\textsuperscript{112}“The Yo Semite Valley,” \textit{Mariposa Gazette}, October 11, 1855 and Stockton \textit{San Joaquin Republican}, October 16, 1855.
\textsuperscript{113}Ibid.
how to treat the land in the still-unexplored western part of the country was present in the minds of many Americans.

Due to the travel accounts published in *Hutchings’ California Monthly*, *Daily Alta California*, and others, Yosemite Valley progressed into a popular tourist destination starting in the late 1850s. Tourism at Yosemite developed in a similar way to that of Niagara a few decades earlier, but with one main difference: by the time Yosemite was promoted through magazine articles and images attracting tourists from the east, there had already been significant development at Niagara Falls and significant criticism from the public.¹¹⁴ Naturally contributing to the increase in Yosemite tourism was the creation of Transcendentalist images, like Ayres’, that promoted it. Other than Ayres, Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Hill were the two most notable artists who took to the Yosemite Valley to find artistic inspiration and fame, as popular spots in the East like Niagara had already been seen and experienced (whether in person or in paintings) by many Americans.¹¹⁵

The images created by these artists were important to the protection of the area because they highlighted (and sometimes exaggerated) the natural wonders of the landscape, stimulating public interest. As evinced at Niagara, public attention to a place with few inhabitants causes an increase in tourism, which opens doors for business-minded people looking to profit by meeting the growing needs of a traveling crowd. The criticism of and dissatisfaction with how this unfolded at Niagara was clear based on comments like those of Frederic Law Olmstead, who stated that Niagara’s aim was

…to make money by the showman’s methods; the idea that Niagara is a spectacular and sensational exhibition, of which

¹¹⁴ See chapter one for discussion of Niagara.
rope-walking, diving, brass bands, fireworks and various “side-shows” are appropriate accompaniments, is so presented to the visitor that he is forced to yield to it, and see and feel little else than that prescribed to him.  

Responses like these that summarized the Niagara experience without any mention of nature were encouragement for the government to act fast and protect Yosemite before it was too late. Yosemite was “discovered” late enough that tourists didn’t start traveling to see it until mid-to-late century, whereas tourists were already traveling to see Niagara in the early 1810s. This was because Niagara was conveniently located in the eastern part of the country, where only a short steamboat or railroad trip was required to reach the Falls. Yosemite, on the other hand, was located much farther away from major city centers and required, at the minimum, month-long journeys to visit. The mountainous terrain made the journey to Yosemite from nearby cities a much more arduous task than crossing the flat terrain required to get to Niagara from eastern cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Even travelers from San Francisco, which is only 190 miles west of the Yosemite Valley, planned trips for multiple weeks because it was so difficult to navigate the passes through the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Yosemite in the Grand Style

Many of the travelers who visited the Yosemite Valley intended to publish travel accounts or were artists seeking to take advantage of one of the most popular American subject matter of the mid-nineteenth century—landscapes of the American West. By the

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117 Ayres and Hutchings, who visited Yosemite from San Francisco stayed at least 10 days, as evidenced in Hutching’s account dated August 9th, which records them setting out on their journey to the Mariposa Grove from Yosemite Valley on August 1st. James Mason Hutchings, letter to the editor, *Mariposa Gazette*, August 9, 1855.
1860s, the Hudson River School was well into its second generation with Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt leading the way as the movement’s most popular artists. Church had become fascinated with South American landscapes and made a name for himself with the exhibition of his grand masterpiece, *Heart of the Andes*, which was exhibited at the Tenth Street Studio in New York City, where Bierstadt and their peers also exhibited. The painting was unveiled in 1859, where the viewers found it installed elaborately with curtains framing it like a window and special lighting so the painting appeared to be emanating light. Also accompanying the painting were artifacts from the artists’ travels and pamphlets that explained the exotic landscape like a travel guide. The painting sold for $10,000, which was, at the time, the most ever paid for an American painting.\(^\text{118}\) Albert Bierstadt was one of the artists who took advantage of the scientific expeditions and traveled west in search of new landscape painting subject matter. In the middle of the century, Bierstadt was a young artist working in New York trying to make a name for himself in the Hudson River School tradition. Albert Bierstadt and his various teams of travelers went on two major expeditions to the Rocky Mountains: first in 1859 and then in 1863.\(^\text{119}\) During his first trips west Bierstadt made enough reference sketches and photographs to produce a number of large oil paintings, including *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, which was completed two years after he returned to New York.\(^\text{120}\)

Bierstadt, like other Hudson River artists working at the time such as Frederic Church and Thomas Moran, created large paintings by looking at smaller sketches and oil

\(^{118}\) Avery, *Church’s Great Picture*, 53.


studies that they made from observation and then combined them—often fabricating aspects to make a dynamic composition—ultimately creating an imagined landscape that represented the American ideal.\(^{121}\) Though Thomas Cole had died before the second generation of painters became well known for their grandiose landscapes, they still implemented many of his theories, including the practice of composing large paintings from smaller studies. Even early in Cole’s career he insisted on showing “compositions” of nature rather than a mirror image of one specific scene from life. In a response to Robert Gilmor, one of Cole’s first patrons, who advised him to avoid fabrication of landscape elements and paint as true-to-life as he could, Cole wrote,

If I am not misinformed, the finest pictures which have been produced, both Historical and Landscape, have been compositions: certainly the best antique statues are compositions, Raphael’s pictures, & those of all the great painters, are something more than imitations of Nature as they found it. I cannot think that beautiful landscape of Wilson’s in which he has introduced Niobe and children in an actual view; Claude's pictures certainly not. If the imagination is shackled, and nothing is described but what we see, seldom will anything truly great be produced either in painting or poetry... A departure from Nature is not a necessary consequence in the painting of compositions: on the contrary, the most lovely and perfect parts of Nature may be brought together and combined in a whole that shall surpass in beauty and effect any picture painted from a single view.\(^{122}\)

His thoughts, which he wrote to his first major patron while still in his twenties, suggest that in order to touch the soul and provoke the mind, a painting must offer an experience closer to being in nature rather than just looking at it. Second generation Hudson River School paintings utilized this theory in order to translate the wide-open spaces,
gargantuan mountain ranges, and geological features of the West that the people in the eastern states had not yet encountered.

When Cole’s *Essay on American Scenery* was published in 1836, the westernmost state was Missouri, so it is understandable that his descriptions of American scenery are primarily limited to the eastern states. He did, however, address the West’s wilderness amidst a section in which he compared the scenery of America to that of Europe:

> He who stands on Mont Albano and looks down on ancient Rome, has his mind peopled with the gigantic associations of the storied past; but he who stands on the mounds of the West, the most venerable remains of American antiquity, may experience the emotion of the sublime, but it is the sublimity of a shoreless ocean un-islanded by the recorded deeds of man.¹²³

Cole meant that experiencing the American wilderness was unlike that of Europe because he considered the nation’s cultural roots to lie in Europe, and America provided a pure natural environment, untouched by “civilized” people.¹²⁴ Cole was born in England and moved to the United States when he was seventeen years old, so his cultural roots actually did lie in Europe. But in this excerpt from *Essay on American Scenery*, he is speaking from the point of view of people who either emigrated from Europe (as he did) or whose ancestors did. He is not taking into consideration the cultures and recorded histories of Native Americans (or anyone else for that matter), who he regarded as an extension of nature, separate from the rest of the country’s population. This is made clear by a statement towards the beginning of the essay, which clearly separates the two populations:

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¹²⁴ Cole refers to people who immigrated to the country from Europe as “civilized” and “enlightened.” Ibid., 102.
A very few generations have passed away since this vast tract of the American Continent, now the United States, rested in the shadow of primæval forests, whose gloom was peopled by savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men; or lay in those wide grassy plains called prairies—... And, although an enlightened and increasing people have broken in upon the solitude, and with activity and power wrought changes that seem magical, yet the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wilderness.\textsuperscript{125}

He categorizes Native Americans as “scarcely less savage” than the beasts with whom they share land, clearly separating them from his perception of “enlightened people.” People from other countries (namely, Europe) arrived with the “magical changes” of technology, but despite the civilized advancement, it is the untouched portions that Cole considered the most impressive.

Similarly to Cole, in letters he wrote while traveling in the Rocky Mountains, Bierstadt expressed his interest in painting local Indians, “for they are rapidly passing away; and soon will be known only in history.”\textsuperscript{126} His words indicate that as travelers from the east continued to move West and claim land, the Indians would be pushed out, never to be seen again. Though the two men were writing more than twenty years apart, Bierstadt’s concern for the extinction of Indians parallels Cole’s observation that “an enlightened and increasing people have broken in upon the solitude” of the American wilderness. Both men admired and found beauty in the untouched western nature (in which they included the humans who first lived there), but feared that people like themselves, from the eastern part of the country, would disturb it with technological and economic development.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Albert Bierstadt, “Rocky Mountains, July 1859,” \textit{The Crayon} 6 (September, 1859): 287.
Despite Bierstadt’s concern for Native American Indians (he collected objects and articles of clothing, which he then exhibited for display in New York upon his return\textsuperscript{127}) he became one of the first famous American artists by creating gigantic masterpieces based on small sketches made while traveling in the mountains. Bierstadt, Church, and Moran followed Cole’s lead and created landscapes that didn’t necessarily show one specific view or location in the mountain ranges the visited; instead they made many sketches and brought them back to the studio to create dramatic natural ideals of still unexplored wilderness. One sketch made by Bierstadt in 1863 is thought by Gordon Hendricks, Bierstadt biographer, to be perhaps the artist’s first conception of his 1866 masterpiece, \textit{A Storm in the Rocky Mountains—Mount Rosalie}. (Fig. 17) In this sketch, (Fig. 18) the most prominent compositional line is one that divides the image into two sections: the right section contains only a few contour marks suggesting rock formations; the left section is broken up into multiple mountainous shapes that indicate multiple levels of rocks, hills, and valleys. The dividing line itself stands out due to its heavier weight and a series of vertical scribbles that add both tone and the semblance of a line of trees.

When applying the composition of Bierstadt’s 1863 sketch to \textit{Mount Rosalie}, the dividing line remains nearly in the same location. The painting is wide compared to the sketch, so the diagonal—ascending from the left—separates the bottom-right third of the canvas with a steep, rocky slope that is highlighted by a sliver of a mountain stream emptying into the lake below. Mount Rosalie, which was later renamed Mount Evans, in reality, is not exceptionally tall and its highest peak does not protrude miles above all others in the area, as Bierstadt’s depiction suggests. (Fig. 19) Likewise, the sketch does

\textsuperscript{127} T.B. Aldrich, “Among the Studios, No. 1,” \textit{Our Young Folks} 1 (September 1865): 597.
not show a heavenly mountain peak in the upper-left portion of the frame, suggesting that Bierstadt added it while composing the painting three years later.

Though aligned with Cole’s theories, Bierstadt’s exaggeration of landscapes was not appreciated by all critics. Many expected landscape paintings made by those who saw them in person to be true-to-life, especially since most Americans had not yet traveled west so they had no real-life reference with which to compare the paintings. A reviewer of Bierstadt’s 1866 painting, Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie in Watson’s Weekly Art Journal complained,

The truth is, we fear, Mr. Bierstadt has undertaken a subject much beyond his powers… The whole science of geology cries out against him… The law of gravitation leagues itself with geological law against the artist. Away up, above the clouds, near the top of the picture, the observer will perceive two pyramidal shapes. By further consultation of the index-sheet, the observer will ascertain that these things are the two “spurs” of Mt. Rosalie. Now, let him work out a problem in arithmetic: The hills over which he looks, as we are told, are three thousand feet high; right over the hills tower huge masses of cloud which certainly carry the eye up to ten or twelve thousand feet higher; above there… the two “spurs;” what is the height of Mt. Rosalie? Answer: approximately, ten thousand miles or so. Impossible.128

In a sense, this critic was complaining of false advertising, accusing Bierstadt of exaggerating natural elements in order to provoke stronger audience reactions. The technique of exaggeration—or even complete fabrication—of landscapes by Hudson River School artists was common, and was justified by Thomas Cole, who stated in a letter written to friend, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878),

Have you not found, I have—that you never succeed in painting scenes, however beautiful, immediately on returning from them? I must wait for time to draw a veil over the common details, the unessential parts, which shall

128 The San Francisco Alta, August 8, 1869.
leave the great features, whether the beautiful or the sublime, dominant in the mind.  

By stating that the landscape included “unessential parts,” Cole defended the exaggeration of mountain peak composition, sunlight directionality, and waterfall height, among other sensationalist amplifications, for the sake of the ideal. Bierstadt and his contemporaries also waited until they returned home to paint their great pictures—for Cole’s reason, and because, logistically, bringing a seven-foot canvas on a month-long journey through mountainous terrain is less than desirable. Instead artists like Bierstadt, Hill, and Moran brought sketchbooks, small canvases, and reference photographs—something that Cole did not have access to because portable photography was not available until the 1850s. Bierstadt produced a number of graphite and ink sketches of landscape elements, which he then used as source material for his larger paintings back in his New York studio.  

Later Representation Across Media

In addition to sketches produced en plein air, Bierstadt also took advantage of the growing practice of photography as a source for his great pictures. Before he ever traveled to Yosemite, Bierstadt viewed young photographer, Carleton E. Watkins’ oversized (roughly 20 x 24”) albumen silver prints of Yosemite at the Goupil Gallery in New York in 1862. Bierstadt was so impressed by the photographs that he planned to

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129 Thomas Cole to William Cullen Bryant in *Funeral Oration on the death of Thomas Cole* by William Cullen Bryant, 1848.
131 Ibid.
132 Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, 79. Watkin’s exhibition at Goupil’s gallery was very well-received and inspired positive reviews including one in the Post which lauded the photographer by saying, “The views of lofty mountains, of gigantic trees, of falls of water which seem to
visit the Yosemite Valley the following year and see the landscape himself, and later was
given prints by the photographer to use as reference images for paintings. Both the artist
and the photographer found inspiration for their work in the Yosemite Valley, and both
their careers benefited from the work they produced upon returning home. For Watkins,
who was based in San Francisco, the opportunity to exhibit his early Yosemite
photographs at Goupil Gallery in New York just two years after he first began
photographing landscapes in 1860 was a big step for his career, and lead to relationships
with some important patrons such as Senator John Conness who championed the
Yosemite Act in 1864.\textsuperscript{133} For Bierstadt, one of the paintings he produced after his first
trip west, \textit{The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak} from 1865, sold at the highest price yet
paid for an American painting, $25,000.\textsuperscript{134}

Not only were Bierstadt and Watkins inspired by the same geographical area, but
Bierstadt also used Watkins’ photographs as source material for his large
compositions.\textsuperscript{135} Bierstadt was known for taking photographs himself, mostly for
documentation and source-material purposes, so that he had images to paint from that
were more detailed than his own sketches. The photographs he took himself were mostly
small wet-plate stereographs, which showed some detail and composition, but not close
to that of Watkins’ mammoth photographs, which, by nature of the larger film, captured
more details and allowed more to be included in the frame. Bierstadt was not the only
artist to use photographs as source material for paintings, although he certainly had
descend from heights in the heavens and break into mists before reaching the ground, are indescribably
\textsuperscript{134} John K. Howat, \textit{American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School} (New York: The
abundant access to photographs as he, and both of his brothers were well versed in photographic processes.\textsuperscript{136} In fact, young Hudson River School artist, William Keith (1838–1911) also found the same purpose in Watkins’ photographs for paintings as Bierstadt did years earlier. Keith’s biographer, Fidelus Cornelius explained: “Keith did not disdain to use photographs to give him ideas for his paintings, but, of course, he did not merely copy them. In the early ‘70s when he was with the well-known photographer, Watkins, in Yosemite and Utah, he got from him many photos of the scenery.”\textsuperscript{137} This account reveals in the defensive tone of the first sentence that using photographs as source material was common, but only for ideas, not to replicate in every detail.

Using the camera to aid drawing and painting is a tradition that dates back to the invention of the camera obscura, centuries earlier. In the mid-eighteenth century Charles-Antoine Jombert's instructional book on drawing included a description of the problem of color and tone when using the camera as a drawing tool:

> It cannot be denied that certain general lessons can in fact be drawn from [the camera obscura] of broad masses of shadows and light: and yet too exact an imitation would be a distortion; because the way in which we see natural objects in the camera obscura is different from the way in which we see them naturally. This glass interposed between two objects and their representation on the paper intercepts the rays of the reflected light which render shadows visible and pleasantly coloured, thus shadows are rendered darker by it than they would be naturally. Local colors of objects being condensed in a smaller space and losing little of their strength seem stronger and brighter in color. The effect is indeed heightened but it is false.\textsuperscript{138}

Though this observation on the shortcomings of the camera was written before there was a method of capturing the photographic image permanently on a surface, it nonetheless addresses the camera’s inability to represent a mirror image of what the eye sees.\footnote{Aaron Scharf, \textit{Art and Photography}, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books) 1968, reprinted in 1974.}

Watkins’ second trip to Yosemite in 1865 produced some of his most famous Yosemite compositions. One such photograph is \textit{View down the Valley from near the Ferry}, (Fig. 20) which shows the calm meadow laid before the towering El Capitán and Cathedral rock formations. For this photograph, Watkins set up his camera equipment on the valley floor, situating the viewer’s eye level at the approximate center of the tree line occupying the middle ground, and separating the valley floor from the distant rock formations. Because of this perspective, the viewer may feel as though she or he is looking up from a slightly diagonal angle. The top of El Capitán is cropped out of the picture, increasing the oppressive presence and withholding the true size of the gigantic rock formation.

When side-by-side with Bierstadt’s \textit{Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California} from the same year (1865), the similarities in compositional direction are unmistakable. Like Watkins’ photograph, Bierstadt’s painting is framed by El Capitán on the right side and Cathedral Rocks on the left side, leaving the valley basin to extend into the distance, separating the two formations at the horizon line. Unlike Watkins’ photograph, however, Bierstadt’s painting includes far fewer trees that separate the foreground from the background. Watkins, of course, didn’t have much of a choice, as he was recording the landscape elements that actually existed at the moment the photograph was taken. Bierstadt, on the other hand, had the option to compose the landscape in whichever way seemed best to him, and was free to decide the placement of each tree, whether or not it
was actually rooted in the soil where he painted it. This difference between the painting and the photograph reiterates the general technique of artists using photographs as source material that Cornelius’ confirmed regarding Keith and Watkins—that the artist did not merely copy the photograph, he used it to aid his artistic vision. While there is no proof that Bierstadt used this specific photograph as the basis for his painting, the fact that the two works were produced the same year allows the viewer the knowledge of what the area looked like (using Watkins’ image for documentary purposes) around the same time Bierstadt’s own sketches and photographs were made as source material for this painting.

*Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* shows the viewer a slightly higher perspective than does *View Down the Valley from near the Ferry*. Instead of situating the viewer’s eye level at the height of a camera on a tripod (slightly below the eye level of the average man) Bierstadt’s viewer is placed on a small hill, whose slope can be seen descending from the foreground into the middle ground. This causes more of the valley and its rock formations to be present in the picture plane. Because of this small hill, the painting’s composition is more dynamic than that of the photograph. The photograph’s composition is divided along the $z$ plane almost exclusively horizontally; the land in the foreground is followed by the river, then more land, then trees—and only then the diagonal lines of the rock formations appeal in the background. Conversely, Bierstadt (in line with many Hudson River School artists)\(^{140}\) used the bottom left corner of the foreground to introduce a variation in topography that is continued throughout every area of the painting, with only one exception being the straight, horizontal line that separates the valley basin from the rock formations and the sky.

\(^{140}\) See Figs. from Ch.1
One can imagine, in the center of the painting’s middle ground just before the horizontal division of the picture by the northwest bank of the Merced River, was Watkins’ chosen spot to set up his photographic equipment. Both the painter and the photographer treat the river similarly—that is, showing a reflection of the large peaks and bright sky, indicating the stillness of the water. But perhaps the biggest difference between the two pictures is the sky. Photographic historian, Nanette Sexton, described the difference in representation of sky as follows:

Unlike a painter, [Watkins] could not move mountains and eliminate the trees, rocks and debris which obstructed his view. Also his control of tonality was severely limited by the requirements of his chemicals. Skies, which were often the painter’s vehicle for dramatic effect were impossible to achieve in a negative.¹⁴¹

The sky in *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* is, indeed, used as a vehicle for dramatic effect, as multi-colored altocumulus cloud formations are scattered across the top half of the picture, starting at the top of the frame with an orangey-pink glow, switching to an array of blues and purples as the clouds move closer to the sun (which is located just behind the base of El Capitán) and then back to orange and light yellow at the horizon line. The sky in Bierstadt’s painting are further dramatized by a handful of tonal stripes directly above El Capitán’s peak, which represent the rays of the setting sun and highlight the artist’s use of primary colors (blue and orange) to create a dynamic and dramatic western sky.

One disadvantage that Watkins faced regarding these dramatic effects was that he was not able to photograph in color (because photo-mechanical color printing processes were not readily available until the 1880s), so his photographs had to rely of expertly

chosen composition, tonal balance, and natural detail. Beyond that—as summarized by Sexton—photographers were unable to capture the detail of the sky in landscape photographs because of the immense light in contrast to the darkness of the terrain. Because of the sensitivity to light of the negatives, capturing tone in cloud formations would require the detail in the landscape to be lost. This can be seen in Watkins’ photograph from 1873, *A Storm on Lake Tahoe*, (Fig. 21) in which the cloud formations are the central focus of the photograph. In this photograph very little detail can be seen in the surrounding land and trees, creating somewhat of a silhouette against a dramatic, stormy sky. Scholar Aaron Scharf described this dilemma in his esteemed 1968 book, *Art and Photography*,

One of the most obvious ways in which the photograph distorts natural objects is its inaccuracy in translating colour and tone. Whether or not the plate or film is sensitive to all colours there are no means, in the black-and-white photograph, of distinguishing between the same tones produced by different colours. The shapes of certain forms which are only distinguishable because of their colours may be entirely lost because the black-and-white photograph cannot sufficiently discriminate between different hues.

This means that despite the incredible detail black-and-white photography is capable of representing, it can never show shape or form defined solely by color, and the viewer of such photographs is required to imagine the color of objects depicted instead of it being shown.

Watkins’ peer and competitor, Edweard Muybridge (1830–1904) overcame the challenge of losing tone and detail when photographing sky by producing a number of

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143 Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 58.
sky studies, whose negatives he combined with those of the landscapes to create an image with detail in both elements in the early 1870s.\textsuperscript{144} Because the sky studies only contained clouds and sunlight in the frame, the camera was able to capture the contrast between the extremely bright sunlight and the only-slightly-less-bright clouds. Introducing the much darker mountains and trees caused too severe of a contrast for the camera to capture, causing either the sky to be an even light-grey, as it was in Watkins’\textit{ View Down the Valley from near the Ferry}, or everything but the sky to be very dark and without much detail, as it was in Watkins’\textit{ A Storm on Lake Tahoe}.

In his\textit{ Essay on American Scenery}, Thomas Cole defines the many pieces of the landscape that form the whole, including the sky, which he describes as “The soul of all scenery, in it are the fountains of light, and shade, and color. Whatever expression the sky takes, the features of the landscape are affected in unison.”\textsuperscript{145} This theory is exemplified by two paintings of the Yosemite Valley painted by Bierstadt in 1868. The first, titled, \textit{Yosemite Valley} (Fig. 22) shows the same view of the valley as \textit{Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California} from three years prior, but in this picture, the sky is predominantly indigo-blue, speckled with a combination of pale yellow and pink altostratus and altocumulus cloud formations. Similarly, as Cole suggests, the rock formations and valley below reflect the pale colors and the farthest rock formations appear even more distant due to their faint, washed-out color—an effect of the bright pale yellow sun that shines on them from behind El Capitán.

The second painting from the same year, \textit{Sunset in the Yosemite Valley}, (Fig. 23) uses nearly the same viewpoint, composition, and time of day as the first painting, but

shows the scene with a terribly more dramatic sky. These two paintings are so similar in every way but the treatment of the sky (and therefore light) that they can be seen as sky studies—both showing the all-encompassing effect that Cole argued the sky has on a landscape. In the second painting, the clouds appear at a much lower altitude, making them a mix of nimbostratus and stratocumulus. Instead of the pale indigo-blue of the first painting, this sky is nearly all a dark charcoal; the only light color in the sky is a deep orange located above the setting sun, peeking out from behind El Capitán and repeated in the few highlights on the dark clouds above. The Merced River in the middle ground reflects the orange clouds, while the entire foreground is in the shadow of the storm clouds, looming amid the pointed peaks of the Cathedral Rocks, which look like dark, gothic towers compared to their monumental, stoic appearance in the first painting.

The difference between the two paintings is rooted in the opposite treatment of the sky, yet the rest of the landscape is “effected in unison” by its change in temperament. As these examples describe, the balance, contrast, and dramatic effects of color were fundamental elements of Hudson River School paintings, especially those of the second generation, whose pictures often showed never-before-seen natural phenomena like giant Redwood trees, rainbow-colored geothermal sulfur pools, or the effects of the setting sun on Yosemite Valley. Even though landscape photography and landscape painting had a somewhat competitive relationship in the mid-nineteenth century, the dramatic effects that color and tone had simultaneously on both the sum and its parts was something that could, at that time, only be mastered by painters. Paintings also did not have the size restriction that photographs did. Because the photographic enlarger was not widely used until the 1880s, professional photographers like Watkins used large plates that could be
up to 18 x 20 inches—extremely large for a photographic plate but still much smaller than the gigantic canvases of the Grand Style, which could be as large as 73 x 120 inches—the size of Albert Bierstadt’s 1863 *Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak*. This size difference allowed for a more sublime experience of the paintings because the viewer was faced with a larger image. The differences between paintings and photographs of Yosemite, however, didn’t necessarily detract from one another. In at least one case, Watkins’ photographs were said to “bear unexceptionable witness to the fidelity of Mr. Bierstadt’s works,”146 indicating that they were both being viewed as art worthy of a positive review in London’s *Art Journal*, and as documentation of the Yosemite Valley. Both the photographs and the paintings of Yosemite followed in the footsteps of Thomas Ayres’ first woodblock engravings to popularize the area that had launched the careers of artists and served as a model of protection for the still relatively unknown Yellowstone region.

Yosemite: a Model for Yellowstone

In 1863, not long after Ayres’s first images of Yosemite were circulated in the eastern part of the country, the man with whom the artist made his first trip West, James Mason Hutchings, claimed 100 acres of land right next to the valley.147 Before any official survey of the area was executed (the same year Bierstadt visited Yosemite for the first time) Hutchings, knowing that the area would be a popular tourist draw, made sure that no matter what kind of tourist development occurred at Yosemite, he would somehow benefit from the profits. Thanks to the Preemption Act of 1841, people were either

allowed to inhabit the land that they had previously been living on, or they were offered to purchase it at an extremely low price.\textsuperscript{148} Based on this common squatters rule, Hutchings didn’t expect to be asked to leave the area, and promptly built a hotel just south of the valley.

One year later, enough travel accounts had been published for Israel Ward Raymond, California state representative of the Central American Steamship Transit Company of New York, to recognize the area’s potential. Raymond did not cite exactly how he became familiar with the Yosemite Valley, but his reaction was monumental, given that there was no precedent for setting aside a section of land for recreational use by the public. Raymond recognized that without governmental protection, more individuals, compromising the trees and the valley, would occupy Yosemite Valley. After describing which parts of the valley and surrounding areas were necessary to protect, Raymond added,

\begin{quote}
The above are granted for public use, resort and recreation and are inalienable forever but leases may be granted for portions not to exceed ten years. All income derived from leases or privileges are to be expended in the preservation and improvement of the prospectus or the roads leading thereto.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}

Raymond’s decision to use the words “inalienable forever” distinguish his intent as one of preservation for the people’s enjoyment, as opposed to the preservation of natural resources for later use. Though Raymond proposed that the government allow “leases,” of the area and reiterated the word “improvement,” leading the reader to believe there was, indeed, room for building tourist accommodations and increasing accessibility, the mere protection of the area by the government assured that Yosemite was not going to be

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
taken over by anyone with enough money to buy land, and that there would be regulation of those who leased it. Two weeks later, Senator John Conness sent Raymond’s letter and an accompanying note of his own to J.W. Elmonds, the Commissioner of the General Land Office, who he asked to prepare a bill regarding the inalienable protection of Yosemite.\textsuperscript{150}

Still, after refusing to abandon the hotel and visitor center he had built before the area was declared a park, Hutchings was fighting for his piece of Yosemite land as late as 1871—the year discussion of Yellowstone land protection reached the Senate. Finally, when Hutchings brought his case to the Supreme Court they ruled against him, forcing him to give up his land to the state for the benefit of the people.\textsuperscript{151} In order to avoid such private land claims, the lawmakers included wording in the Yellowstone Act that would prevent individuals like Hutchings from using the land for monetary advantage.

Reflecting on the incident, Illinois Senator, Lyman Trumbull stated,

\begin{quote}
We did set apart the region of country on which the mammoth trees grow in California, and the Yosemite valley also we have undertaken to reserve, but there is a dispute about it. Now before there is any dispute as to this wonderful country, I hope we shall except it from the general disposition of public lands, and reserve it to the Government.
\end{quote}

Trumbull was, of course, speaking about Yellowstone and the need to protect it from private interests so to avoid a situation like Hutchings’ Yosemite claim. So it happened to

\textsuperscript{150} Alfred Runte, \textit{The Embattled Wilderness}, 34.
\textsuperscript{151} U.S. Congress, House, \textit{Congressional Globe}, 40\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., June 3, 1868, 2816–17; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Private Land Claims, \textit{S. Rept. 185 to Accompany H.R. 1118}, 40\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., July 23, 1868; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Public Lands, \textit{J. M. Hutchings, J. C. Lamon, H. Rept. 2 to accompany H.R. 184, 41\textsuperscript{st} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., January 18, 1970}; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Public Lands, \textit{Memorial of J. M. Hutchings Praying a Grant of Lands in the Yosemite Valley, California}, S. Misc. Doc. 72, 41\textsuperscript{st} Cong., 3\textsuperscript{rd} sess., February 21, 1871.
be, that the man who was one of the earliest supporters and promoters of the Yosemite—the man who helped Thomas Ayres publish the first-ever circulated image of the valley, without which there would have been no mammoth paintings of the valley by Bierstadt—turned out to be the very example of why government land protection was so essential to the nation’s most beautiful natural places.
Chapter Three: Yellowstone

Thomas Moran’s 1872 painting, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (Fig. 3), finished just months after Yellowstone had been protected by the federal government as the world’s first National Park, represents not only the natural beauty of the American landscape but also the explorative accomplishments of the people who surveyed it. The painting is 84 x 144 inches and provides a view of a collection of Yellowstone’s most unique features: the waterfall that empties into the rocky valley, the steam vents that are visible in the distant background, and the yellow walls of the canyon that gave Yellowstone its name. In addition to the geological characteristics that make Yellowstone famous, Moran also included figures in his landscape painting, illustrating the importance of survey members of the three major surveys into Yellowstone, the most influential being one led by geologist Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden in 1871.

Comparing Moran’s *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* with earlier landscape images, for example, William James Bennett’s *View of the British Fall Taken from Goat Island* of Niagara Falls, calls attention to the differing identities of the figures in each image is evidence of the difference in land use. The visitors in the lower-left of Moran’s canvas have been traveling on horseback; one sits to look at a map, another stands at the edge of the cliff with an Indian guide, pointing as if solidifying a plan of action. The Niagara visitors are a leisurely group comprised of a man and three women. The women wear colorful dresses and sun hats; the woman closest to the Falls holds a parasol and looks into the distance at the view as the man, wearing a top hat, looks at her. The other two women are engaged in conversation next to a basket, indicating the four are
partaking of an afternoon picnic—in fact, only one of the figures is actually looking at the Falls.

In Bennett’s Niagara print, a boardwalk can be seen covering the rocks above Horseshoe Falls, and a number of buildings are visible on the opposite shore in the background. Moran’s view is untouched by human presence beyond the cliff in the foreground. The difference in medium of the two images is another telling contrast. Bennett’s engraving was distributed as an inexpensive souvenir print for tourists to purchase during their trip and bring home as a reminder of Niagara, and as a means of promotion—a visual to show friends and family back home. Because of how Bennett portrayed the tourists in the picture, prospective visitors were encouraged to imagine themselves at the Falls, relaxing pleasurably in the picturesque landscape. In contrast, Moran’s treatment of the figures in his painting represents a more adventurous spirit. When the painting was completed, tourism like that of Niagara had not reached Yellowstone, but Moran’s painting was no less promotional. Instead of being distributed to individuals to share and encourage further support of the private interests like those at Niagara hungry for more visitors, the painting was purchased by the U.S. government and promptly hung in the White House as a reminder of the newfound Eden that was a main attraction for the new project of Western Expansion. Rather than serving as a tool for the growth of private wealth, Moran’s painting represented the national desire for a pristine landscape, untouched by humans.

Moran was a member of one of Hayden’s survey but he was producing images of Yellowstone before he had ever seen it, as illustrations for a travel account from an earlier expedition into the area. There were two major surveys that preceded Hayden’s:
the Folsom-Cook-Peterson survey in 1869 and the Washburn-Langford-Doane survey in 1870. Unfortunately, neither of the earlier surveys included an artist, but knowing the public’s desire to see the natural beauty of the American continent, bank clerk Nathaniel P. Langford (1832–1911) published an account of his journey through the Yellowstone valley and asked a young Thomas Moran to draw illustrations based on his descriptions. The outcome was a two-part essay published in *Scribner’s Monthly* that provided the most information about the area at the time.152 The main purpose of both of these expeditions was explorative. Folsom made a career of exploring new territory, starting with his involvement in pioneering a mining route from Minnesota to the western mountains, and Washburn was a Civil War general who ended up leading his Yellowstone expedition because of his leadership experience and his involvement in the developing western territories.

Miner-turned-explorer David E. Folsom (1839–1918) wrote the first Yellowstone travel account to be published in a national periodical, introducing the eastern U.S. population to the wonders of the area. Folsom’s description was so wonderful, in fact—describing the geothermal features such as sulfur vents and hot springs that aren’t common in the East—that *Scribner’s Monthly* refused to publish it at first because they believed it to be fictitious.153 *Western Monthly* (based in Chicago) did publish it, albeit without images, in 1870.154 The journalistic evidence of Yellowstone’s existence thrust into public knowledge first by Folsom, then by Langford, and finally by members of the Hayden survey including Thomas Moran, added to the already-growing idea to protect Yellowstone for public use.

153 Hassrick, *Drawn to Yellowstone*, 23.
In addition to the three aforementioned surveys in the Yellowstone area, the nation had already made efforts in land protection that acted as models for the world’s first National Park. First, after the fall in popularity of Niagara Falls due to private interests’ commercialization of the nation’s largest water work, tourists no longer visited for the natural beauty alone, but also for the tourist attractions such as tightrope walking and boat cruises.\textsuperscript{155} Because the tourist development at Niagara moved so quickly and occurred during a time before the country was concerned with preservation of nature for anything other than economic resources, the Transcendentalist visitor experience was degraded by a lack of regulations. Because of the disappointment surrounding the Niagara experience, a preemptive response was built into the language used to define the first National Park, so that it could truly be a place of enjoyment for the public.

Second, just less than one thousand miles away from Yellowstone, the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove had just been declared public under the protection of the state of California in 1864. Though Niagara Falls and the Yosemite Valley are significantly smaller plots of land than Yellowstone, the two events provided precedent for the type of protection that was necessary to preserve Yellowstone from the rapid development that loomed at its doorstep. The images and travel accounts from the three major surveys between the years of 1869 and 1871 defined what needed to be protected.

Analyzing these images and accounts as outlines for what area of land to protect and why raises a number of questions including: What role did the images from each respective survey have in the land protection decision? Which of Thomas Moran’s images were really most influential in the creation of the park? What kinds of images were presented to Congress that were influential in the passage of the Yellowstone Act?

\textsuperscript{155} Irwin, \textit{The New Niagara}, 10. For more Niagara sources, see Chapter 1.
By looking at primary source material from Congress, the Folsom, Washburn, and Hayden survey party members, and popular periodicals of the period, I will address these questions.

**History of Surveys into Yellowstone & Early Representation**

The first of the three major expeditions into Yellowstone was the self-funded Folsom-Cook-Peterson survey of 1869, which was made up of Charles Cook (1839–1927), David E. Folsom, and William Peterson (1834–1919). The Folsom-Cook-Peterson party (from here on out referred to as the Cook expedition as Charles Cook was the captain of the party) is responsible for the first widely distributed, written accounts of the wonders to Yellowstone. The article, titled, "The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone," was published in 1870 in the July issue of *Western Monthly* based in Chicago.156

Even the Cook expedition—being the first official survey of the area—recognized the potential for tourism and development. Between 1861 and 1864 Nevada, Kansas, and Nebraska had all joined the union and the Washington and Idaho territories had ceded land to the Montana, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Dakota territories. All of this rapid change regarding the nation’s land division was an early sign of westward expansion. In Folsom’s essay he reflected on being one of the first white men to see the area yet untouched by western civilization:

> As we were about departing on our homeward trip, we ascended the summit of a neighboring hill, and took a final look at Yellowstone Lake. Nestled among the forest-crowned hills which bounded our vision, lay this inland sea, its crystal waves dancing and sparkling in the sunlight, as if laughing with joy for their wild freedom. It is a scene of

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156 “The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone,” 60–67.
transcendent beauty, which has been viewed by but few white men; and we felt glad to have looked upon it before its primeval solitude should be broken by the crowds of pleasure-seekers which at no distant day will throng its shores.  

Given the rise in popularity of places like the Hudson River Valley and Niagara Falls in the east, and the recent protection of Yosemite, Folsom foresaw pleasure-seekers use of Yellowstone. From beginning with a romantic description of Yellowstone Lake to the negative prediction regarding tourists, the effect of his and the survey expeditions following his is neatly represented in this one paragraph from Folsom’s essay. The survey teams went into the territories to find out what beauty and resources the nation had to offer and produced images and descriptions promoting the wonders that would eventually require development to aid those who were so inspired to visit.

While the Cook expedition didn't produce any illustrations to accompany the surveyors' descriptive article, it did inspire an article written by Folsom and Cook together, which was the most detailed account of Yellowstone yet. The party of three recorded their entire journey from before departure to their safe return. The impact of this trip is evident in the accounts that relay what the members of the trip told their peers upon their return including this statement made by Nathaniel P. Langford (1832–1911), who would in 1870 depart on the following expedition of the area led by Henry Washburn (1832–1871),

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157 Ibid.
158 This account was added to in the early part of the 20th century by all three members of the party and a reconstructed account—pieced-together written accounts from letters, published articles, and journal entries—was published in 1965 under the organization of Yellowstone scholar, Aubrey Haines. The reconstructed account is a compilation of the original published account from 1870, and additions made by all three party members in subsequent years. Each addition or section is labeled for the date it was added to the account. Aubrey Haines, ed., The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone: An Exploration of the Headwaters of the Yellowstone River in the Year 1869, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).
On his return to Helena [Folsom] related to a few of his intimate friends many of the incidents of his journey, and Mr. Samuel T. Hauser and I invited him to meet a number of the citizens of Helena at the director's room of the First National Bank in Helena; but on assembling there were so many present who were unknown to Mr. Folsom that he was unwilling to risk his reputation for veracity, by a full recital, in the presence of strangers, of the wonders he had seen. He said that he did not wish to be regarded as a liar by those who were unacquainted with his reputation. But the accounts which he gave to Hauser, Gillette and myself renewed in us our determination to visit that region during the following year.\textsuperscript{159}

Langford’s description of hearing Folsom’s account reveals the excited inspiration surrounding Yellowstone at the time. After the Cook expedition returned and Folsom’s article was published, there were more than just rumors of Yellowstone and its mysterious geological features. For Langford, who was a businessman and entrepreneur, Folsom’s account was to be trusted, and inspired him to actively pursue a visit for himself.

If the Cook expedition inspired Langford to rally a team to further explore the area, then Langford’s expedition most certainly inspired artist, Thomas Moran’s involvement with the Yellowstone area, which later became his claim to fame. The expedition Langford was a part of in 1870 is known as the Washburn-Langford-Doane survey (which will hereafter be referred to as the Washburn expedition) and is credited, somewhat legendarily, for coming up with the idea of protecting the Yellowstone area as a public national park.\textsuperscript{160} The Washburn party was made up of Nathaniel P. Langford, Henry D. Washburn, and Gustavus C. Doane (1840–1892), a military escort (lead by

\textsuperscript{159} Nathaniel P. Langford, \textit{Diary of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870} (St. Paul, Minn.: J. E. Haynes Co., 1905) xi.

Doane, who was a Lieutenant) and one reporter sent from the Herald to keep the public up-to-date with the progress of the team.\textsuperscript{161}

Twelve days after the Washburn party departed Helena in Montana territory, they were finally faced with what Folsom had written about, but so many still didn’t believe existed:

A column of steam rising from the dense woods to the height of several hundred feet, became distinctly visible. We had all heard fabulous stories of this region and were somewhat skeptical as to appearances. At first, it was pronounced a fire in the woods, but presently some one noticed that the vapor rose in regular puffs, and as if expelled with a great force. Then conviction was forced upon us. It was indeed a great column of steam, puffing away on the lofty mountainside, escaping with a roaring sound, audible at a long distance even through the heavy forest. A hearty cheer rang out at this discovery and we pressed onward with renewed enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{162}

The steam vents, the first of which they described their reaction to above, ended up being a main focus of the illustrations that accompanied the travel account published following their journey. Upon the Washburn party’s return, Langford, with help from former Yellowstone surveyor, Charles Cook, published a two-part essay in \textit{Scribner's Monthly} entitled "The Wonders of Yellowstone." While Langford’s description was a comprehensive description of his journey and the elements of the landscape itself, there were no professional artists included in the trip. At the time of both the Cook and the Washburn surveys, Moran was establishing his career as a painter following the tradition of the Hudson River School and seeking success from painting the western territories like his peer Albert Bierstadt had, years earlier. By the time Langford’s account of his

\textsuperscript{161} Haines, \textit{Yellowstone National Park}, 57.
involvement in the Washburn expedition was ready for publication, Moran was working as an engraver for *Scribner's Monthly* and was asked to make illustrations to go with Langford's essays based on the author’s written descriptions and crude drawings.\(^{163}\) This was an important step in Moran’s career because at this time he was just emerging from his formative years, no longer working as an engraver’s apprentice, and instead working as an illustrator in his own right.\(^{164}\) Taking on the project of illustrating Langford’s essay resulted in Moran’s first image of Yellowstone, a woodblock print that marked the beginning of his pictures of the west and the major project of his career.

The perspective in "Upper Falls of the Yellowstone, Wyoming" (Fig. 24) places the viewer near the bottom of the canyon, just one level of rocks above the tumbling river below. The verticality of the image encourages multiple levels of rocky cliffs at varying elevations. In the immediate foreground, a rocky outcrop lined on either side with trees and the slanting face of a boulder reach out to offer a place to rest for three weary travelers. Across the river, which flows diagonally out of the frame, the rocky cliff is divided into sharp sections of light and dark, a line of pine trees, and then the vertical cliff over which the Upper Falls of Yellowstone flow. The falls plummet back down the river and disappear in clouds of water and air, which, defined only by the weight of hash marks closely resembles the clouds high in the top left corner of the image, above all the ragged cliffs and a mountain peak so tall, it’s cropped out of the frame.

Moran composed this depiction of the Upper Falls based on Langford’s description of it, not from life or from other sketches or photographs. Langford describes

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\(^{163}\) Merrill, *Yellowstone and the Great West*, 13.

the Upper Falls as “entirely unlike [the Lower Falls], but in its peculiar character equally interesting.” In his essay he goes on to say:

The stream is narrowed between the rocks as it approaches the brink, and bounds with impatient struggles for release, leaping through the stony jaws, in a sheet of snow-white foam, over the precipice nearly perpendicular, 115 feet high… The two confronting rocks, overhanging the verge at the height of a hundred feet or more, could be readily united by a bridge, from which some of the grandest views of natural scenery in the world could be obtained—while just in front of, and within reaching distance of the arrowy water, from a table one-third of the way below the brink of the fall, all its nearest beauties and terrors may be caught at a glance.\(^{165}\)

While describing the beauty of the Upper Falls using poetic rather than purely scientific language, Langford manages to slip in a suggestion of tourist development; that the two towering rocks above the falls invite the possibility of a bridge for viewing the scenery from an even better angle. Moran echoes Langford’s poetic description by placing the “stony jaws” and the “sheet of snow-white foam” that plunges between them, at the center of the composition. While the image is recognizable when comparing it to the description on which is was based, it still uses Hudson River School composition techniques typical in earlier paintings of the eastern American landscapes, such as placing small figures in the bottom-left portion of the frame, using the center of the picture plane as the center for the most action—in many cases where waterfalls empty into rivers—and the image being divided by a diagonally-flowing body of water.

In 1871, one year after Langford and Cook’s “The Wonders of the Yellowstone” was published with Moran’s images, Moran accompanied Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden

\(^{165}\)“The Wonders of the Yellowstone,” *Scribner's Monthly* 2, no. 1 (May, 1871).
and a team of more than 30 men on a geological expedition into the Yellowstone area.\textsuperscript{166} Hayden, a geologist and accomplished surveyor, lead his team of men into the heart of what is now Yellowstone National Park in the summer of 1871, intending to collect as much practical data as possible to present to the government officials for whom he worked.\textsuperscript{167} The expedition was funded by the government and was intended to discover potential uses for and presence of gold in the Yellowstone area. The Department of the Interior was interested in whether or not the unexplored area could be used for agricultural or economic purposes, but given the rumors regarding the beauty of the area, the main purpose of the expedition was to find the best route to Yellowstone that could potentially be used by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company.\textsuperscript{168} The United States government funded the Hayden survey of 1871 partly for the purpose of finding a use for the land thought of as the last remaining wilderness in America. As evidenced by the earlier popularization of such tourist destinations as the Catskills, Niagara Falls, and most recently, the Yosemite Valley, the government was aware of what a beautiful natural environment could do for land and economic development such as tourism in future parks.\textsuperscript{169}

The Hayden Expedition & its Visual Output

Based on Hayden’s reports, congressional discussion included warnings against allowing Yellowstone to become another Niagara. In a report for the House Committee on the

\textsuperscript{166} F.V. Hayden, “The Wonders of the West—II: More about The Yellowstone,” \textit{Scribner’s Monthly} 3, no. 4 (February 1872), 394.
\textsuperscript{167} After receiving a medical degree from the Albany Medical School in Albany, NY, Hayden built his surveying career by completing a fossil-collecting trip in present-day South Dakota in 1853, and numerous geological surveys in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain areas in the 1860s and 70s. By the Yellowstone expedition of 1871, he was the head of the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories. Merrill, \textit{Yellowstone and the Great West}, 216-7.
\textsuperscript{168} Runte, \textit{National Parks}, 37.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 47.
Public Lands published just a month before Yellowstone National Park was established, it was suggested that already private interests intended to “fence in these rare wonders so as to charge visitors a fee, as is now done at Niagara Falls, for the sight of that which ought to be as free as the air or water.” Lawmakers in 1872—like House Representative Mark Dunnell of Minnesota, who presented the quoted Public Lands report—looked to the Niagara model as something to avoid; instead of allowing wealthy individuals to take whatever land they pleased, Congress declared Yellowstone the first federally protected plot of land for public enjoyment. Thanks to the support of government officials like Dunnell and Senator Samuel Pomeroy of Kansas, both of whom presented findings from official surveys into Yellowstone and warned against Yellowstone becoming another Niagara, Congress was convinced in 1872 that the area was to be protected against individuals seeking ownership for profit. The Yellowstone Act states that the area

...is hereby reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States, and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people; and all persons who shall locate or settle upon occupy the same, or any part thereof, except as hereafter provided, shall be considered trespassers and removed therefrom.

The popularity of Transcendentalist ideas combined with the development of the transcontinental railroad system caused a growth in tourism to the western territories, so it was necessary for the government to figure out what to do with the Yellowstone region.

170 This report was written by Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden, then adapted and republished by the Committee on the Public Lands itself, and presented to Congress by House Representative Mark Dunnell of Minnesota. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on the Public Lands, The Yellowstone Park, H. Rept. 26 (to accompany H.R. 764, 42nd Cong. 2nd sess., February 28, 1872), under 1–2.
171 Ibid.
172 Runte, National Parks, 38–39.
173 The Yellowstone Act, 1872.
before individuals claimed land for private use or for personal profit.\textsuperscript{174} Private
development was something the nation saw happen at Niagara Falls a few decades earlier,
and wanted to avoid so that as much of the public as possible could enjoy the
landscape—ideally unchanged—for generations in the future.\textsuperscript{175} The rapid development
at Niagara Falls prompted a Commissioner’s Report of the area in 1879, which reflected
on the consequences of private ownership. In this report, Frederick Law Olmsted,
designer of New York’s Central Park and original Park Commissioner of Yosemite,
stated:

There are those, and I fear that most of the people of
Niagara are among them, to whom it appears that the
waterfalls have so supreme an interest to the public that
what happens to the adjoining scenery is of trifling
consequence. Were all the trees cut away, quarries opened
in the ledges, the banks packed with hotels and factories,
and every chance-open space occupied by a circus tent, the
falls would still, these think, draw the world to them.
Whatever has been done to the injury of the scenery has
been done, say they, with the motive of profit, and the
profit realized is the public’s verdict of acquittal. It must be
considered, therefore, that the public has not had the case
fairly before it. The great body of visitors to Niagara come
as strangers. Their movements are necessarily controlled by
the arrangements made for them. They take what is offered,
and pay what is required with little exercise of choice. The
fact that they accept the arrangements is no evi-
dence of
their approval. \textit{The real question is, how, in the long run, is}
\textit{the general experience of visitors affected by measures and}
courses which are determined with no regard to the
\textit{influence of the scenery}?\textsuperscript{176}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[174] Merrill, \textit{Yellowstone and the Great West}, 15.
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Although Hayden’s team completed their survey a few years before this report was published, the experience of visiting Niagara had already evolved into an expensive tourist venture for which visitors opened their wallets “with little choice,” and no longer were able to experience the scenery as they did before railroad and steamboat travel brought more people—and more money—to the area.

With all this in mind, Moran was invited to join the Hayden expedition party for two reasons. The first is that based on the images he made for Langford’s essay published two years prior, Moran had proven himself as an artist with no trouble creating illusionistic representations of nature (even if he had not seen it). This reason was beneficial to Hayden, who was, after all, a geologist, and intended to return to the Department of the Interior with an expansive knowledge of the various and unfamiliar rock formations and geothermal features of Yellowstone, which were proven to exist by Langford and Cook’s account of their travels to the area. But the main reason Moran was included in the survey was because Jay Cooke (1821–1905), a major financier of postwar development, namely the western expansion of the railroad system, was convinced the area would be of great interest to tourists, who, once inspired to travel, would make use of his prospective railroad line. When the Hayden party was organizing, Jay Cooke and the Northern Pacific did not yet have a route that went near Yellowstone. Cooke hoped that the findings of the expedition would benefit his plans to connect the Northern Pacific line in the Montana Territory to the Union Pacific line in southern Wyoming Territory, passing and stopping at the Yellowstone Basin. Cooke knew that grand paintings in the popular first New York School style that exposed the

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177 Hayden, *Report to the Committee on the Public Lands*, 1872.
wild beauty of the Yellowstone region exhibited to the public would increase the tourism in the area.

When Thomas Moran created his first woodblock prints of the Yellowstone area in 1870, he was 33 years old and his career was not well established. The images he produced while working as an illustrator for *Scribner’s Monthly* were seen by the public, but did not have his name attached to them the way large oil paintings did. Images reproduced in small sizes for periodicals reached, by the late 1800s, tens of thousands of people. But the illustrations hardly were intended to stand on their own as works of art; the primary purpose of the illustrations was to support the main content—the written articles. Though these small landscape illustrations were not shown in galleries, the national exposure launched him into a lifelong project of representing the wonders of the Yellowstone region to thousands of Americans. The culmination of his first exploration of the area, which is located in northwest Wyoming, southwest Montana, and the eastern corner of Idaho, was a large (84 by 144 inches) oil painting titled *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*.

Two months after returning from Yellowstone, Moran completed the painting and it was exhibited at Clinton Hall in New York City in 1872. This exhibition attracted a much different audience than that of his woodblock illustrations—namely "the press—the literati—the artists—all the rich people" who frequented high-end art auctions. After three years of only hearing stories and seeing small black-and-white prints of Yellowstone, the public and the wealthy investors, who, like Jay Cooke, were interested

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180 Hoornstra and Heath, *American Periodicals*.
in the financial potential of tourism in the west, were eager to see proof of the wonderful Yellowstone features in a large-scale, full-color format. Following the painting’s success at Clinton Hall, it traveled to the Smithsonian for a brief two-week exhibition, after which it was sent to hang in the Speaker’s Office at the Old Hall of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Moran himself, urged Congress to buy the painting to hang permanently in the nation’s capitol and he eventually succeeded when Congress agreed and secured $10,000 to purchase it in June of 1872—making it the first landscape painting to be acquired for the Congressional collection.\(^\text{183}\) The painting was subsequently bought by the United States government and hung in the Capitol as a reminder of the nation’s decision in 1872 to create the world’s first National Park.\(^\text{184}\)

*The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, completed in 1872, was completed the same year the Yellowstone region was signed into law at the first National Park.\(^\text{185}\) Moran viewed this painting as perhaps one of the most important he had yet made and was deeply interested in representing the scene as true to life as he possibly could. In a letter he wrote to Hayden in March of 1872, he requests the geologist’s eye for fact checking,

> I cast all my claims to being an artist, into this one picture of the Great Cañon & am willing to abide by the judgment upon it. All my friends in this region declare that it is already a great success, but I cannot feel confident about it, until you have seen it. In fact I cannot finish it until you have seen it, as your deep knowledge of nature & her workings would make your judgments on the truths of the picture of far greater value to me, than that of any other man in the country. Your knowledge of cause & effect in

\(^{184}\) “Thomas Moran’s Water-Color Drawings,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 5, no. 3 (January 1873): 394.
\(^{185}\) *The Yellowstone Park*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., (March 1, 1872), S. 392.
nature, would point out to me many facts connected with the place that I may have overlooked.\textsuperscript{186}

The painting was important to Moran because it was the first major painting he made after the Yellowstone woodcuts had been published in \textit{Scribner’s}, and those works had garnered him notoriety, somewhat advancing his still developing career. The Hayden survey, being a government-funded expedition warranted exposure and popularity of an oil-painted depiction of the landscape—\textit{if done right}.\textsuperscript{187} But although Moran was dedicated to representing the geology of Yellowstone accurately, he was more concerned with presenting the overall essence of the area to his viewers rather than composing a scene with all landmarks located accurately in relation to one another. Of this particular painting Moran stated:

\begin{quote}
I place no value upon literal transcripts from Nature. My general scope is not realistic; all my tendencies are toward idealization...Topography in art is valueless. The motive or incentive of my "Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone" was the gorgeous display of color that impressed itself upon me. Probably no scenery in the world presents such a combination. The forms are extremely wonderful and pictorial, and, while I desired to tell truly of Nature, I did not wish to realize the scene literally, but to preserve and to convey its true impression.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

Moran’s dedication to representing an idealization of the landscape parallels Thomas Cole’s reflection before his death, that he must “wait for time to draw a veil over the common details, the unessential parts” when painting a landscape after he had seen it in person, which allowed only “the great features, whether the beautiful or the sublime, [to

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remain] dominant in the mind.” Moran’s Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone employs this theory by showing all the major attractions in the space of one picture-plane, even though the geyser steam vents can’t be seen from that particular spot in the canyon, and the rocky cliffs don’t alternate in layers quite as picturesquely as Moran painted them.

When Moran finished the painting the critics mostly responded in great support of both the picture and the young artist. One critic wrote,

However earnest our effort, we must fail to do more than awaken curiosity to see a work so indescribable as this remarkable picture—remarkable as being a great and so far successful effort to depict for us the culminating wonder of a region new and strange to us, as different in all its pictorial elements of form and color, all if it were a sudden revelation of another world, governed by other laws than those of the nature which we know.”

Moran’s motives, and his reason for being included in the expedition were confirmed in the painting’s success. His dedication to creating a picture that would be popular with the public and please the financial backer of his trip (the Department of the Interior) is evinced by the style and composition with which he painted. Other than the canyon itself, the central focus of The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, is the waterfall and the water it casts off as it flows. The use of the waterfall as a major element in his composition was not unusual in the second generation of the Hudson River School, continuing the tradition of Thomas Cole. Moran used this popular natural feature as an entry-point into a landscape that few who viewed the painting would have yet seen. While the waterfall is located in the background of the painting, it is painted as a pure white burst of water against a partially shadowed portion of the canyon. This highlighting technique draws the

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189 William Cullen Bryant, Funeral Oration on the Death of Thomas Cole before the National Academy of Design, May 4, 1848 (published as a pamphlet).
viewer’s eye to the falls immediately, leading it then to the equally bright-white rock
towers that glow in the shining sun 191 and then down the diagonal division between
shadow and light that defines the canyon’s steep eastern wall. The angled line terminates
abruptly at a boulder on which stand two figures, a white explorer and a Native American
guide.

The pathway by which the eye is guided promotes the most magnificent features
of the landscape, though many more, smaller elements can be seen if one looks closely.
For example, the steam vents in the far background contribute to the drama of the scene
as well. Though they make up but a tiny detail next to the grandiose canyon, they indicate
the diversity of natural wonders that were at that time, to most people, a mystery. Another
detail that adds to the complex composition is an animal, which hides in the darkness of
the forest on the left-of-center edge of the picture plane. By including such a detail in a
painting depicting white explorers and Indian guides, a reference is made to what affect
the explorers had on the landscape and its incumbent inhabitants. On the one hand, the
presence of the explorers altered the natural environment by the removal of trees for
firewood and the collection of geological samples brought back to the Department of the
Interior. 192 On the other hand, from a nineteenth century perspective, it was because of
the explorers’ efforts that the area became protected for the public by the federal
government. Moran, included in the expedition for image-based promotional purposes,
seemingly wasn’t concerned with either of these issues, based on the fact that his

191 The painting is made to represent the lighting that would occur around early afternoon. Townley, New
York Mail.
192 Not to mention the surveyors’ intention to fight off any Native American group they encountered, which
they prepared for by bringing a military escort. Mark D. Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian
comments in correspondence mostly references his duties as a survey artist and his enjoyment of the landscape.\textsuperscript{193}

In 1871 there was no such thing as what we think of today as environmentalism, but instead, transcendentalist ideas dominated many people’s thoughts about nature. Unfortunately, transcendentalism had little consideration of Native Americans, who had a long-standing relationship with American nature. In fact, it was common for white surveyors to find the presence of Native Americans in places of exploration bothersome and inconvenient. In his journal, Hayden expedition member George Allen recorded his general opinions on Indians of no specific culture:

The Eye of the Indian is peculiar as it regards expression. There is a certain deep, dark, deceitful and determined expression, which added to the intense blackness of the pupil, is surely suggestive of treachery and blood. There is a sort of stoic fixedness which ordinarily presents itself in the Indian’s eye. It is not a stare, it is not the index of indifference or inattention. It rather indicates the most watchful, cautious, plotting observation. An ophidian eye that cannot apparently be moved from its purpose, and yet, if closely watched there will now and then be detected a lurking twinkle bespeaking a consciousness of having satisfactorily formed some diabolical plot to be executed in the future.\textsuperscript{194}

Those who didn’t feel quite as threatened by the various cultural groups they encountered mostly believed that all Indians were members of a dying race that had no hope in the wake of white settlement. This kind of approach to native groups was partly popularized by artist George Catlin in the early 1830s when he undertook the task of documenting as many Native Americans as he could. He wrote, “I have, for many years past, contemplated the noble races of red men who are now spread over these trackless forests.

\textsuperscript{193} Thomas Moran to Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden, 11 March 1872; Merrill, \textit{Yellowstone and the Great West}, 8–9; Anderson, \textit{Thomas Moran}, 200.
\textsuperscript{194} Journal entry of George Allen, June 3, 1871, reprinted in Merrill, \textit{Yellowstone and the Great West}, 59.
and boundless prairies, melting away at the approach of civilization.”\textsuperscript{195} However, native cultural groups were feared and un-trusted, even when they provided information about the land or acted as guides as Moran depicted in his painting.

Moran’s carefully composed painting of Yellowstone’s canyon speaks to the transcendentalist ideas of nature’s grandeur and sublimity, as well as the changing cultural landscape of the Yellowstone area. The presence of explorers in his picture most directly references his travels with the Hayden expedition, as if he were recreating a scene from their trip, but it also more metaphorically represents the purpose of their trip—the exploration of unknown and untouched wilderness. It prompts the viewers back in the east to ponder the experience being so small amongst such titanic natural forms. \textit{The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone} was made for a public audience. It is composed dramatically and includes human figures to incite the adventurer’s drive to come see the area for his or herself.

Moran’s \textit{Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone} was less a promotional image than a reminder of the explorative success and western expansion of the nation in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The images that served the purpose Jay Cooke had hoped to address by suggesting Moran accompany the expedition in the first place were the ones that were more widely distributed, such as woodblock illustrations and watercolors published in Hayden’s report and exhibited in galleries back east. Some of Moran’s woodblock engravings, which weren’t included in Hayden’s portfolio, but were published in popular periodicals like \textit{Scribner’s} and travel books, showcased the extraordinary features of Yellowstone by using multiple viewpoints in one image, like \textit{Geysers in the}

\footnote{George Catlin, \textit{Illustration of the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians} (New York, 1841), 14–16; reprinted in McCoubrey, \textit{American Art}, 95.}
Yellowstone Valley. (Fig. 25) This particular woodblock print was published in 1873 in The Peoples' Pictorial Atlas, which described “geographical, statistical, topographical and commercial aspects” of areas all over the world.¹⁹⁶

*Geysers in the Yellowstone Valley* shows six areas of the park: Hot Spring Cone, Castle Geyser, Castle Geyser & Fire Basin, Giant Geyser, Boiling Springs, and The Grotto in the center. Each vignette floats around the central image of The Grotto. Each area is drawn with a foreground, and background, with the prominent feature in the middle ground. Boiling Springs and The Grotto both include figures, providing scale and examples of what the Hayden party members did at Yellowstone. In the Boiling Springs vignette, a man with a backpack stands on the edge of a hot spring plateau, looking over the edge of a cliff. At The Grotto, a photographer—one imagines the survey photographer, William Henry Jackson—under the curtain of his camera, which is aimed at The Grotto geyser in full eruption.

The prominent inclusion of the photographer in the central (and largest) vignette, references the accessibility of the medium. This type of multiple-perspective bookplate illustration was published in anthologies of travel accounts or in books like *The Peoples’ Pictorial Atlas*, published in 1872, which showed illustrations and descriptions of places of interest all over the world to the general public. The more figures are included in the scenes, the more viewers can imagine themselves in place of the figures. In the case of The Grotto, Moran placed the viewer behind and slightly above that of the photographer. This perspective presents the viewer with both the postcard-perfect image of spewing

geysers and the process by which the image was recorded. This awareness on the part of the artist assured supporters—the publishers of the periodicals that printed these composite-style images; the funders of the expedition on which he sketched the drawings, and the railroad companies that intended to develop near the area—that tourists would be able to imagine themselves in the landscape before many actually visited it.

Other images made by Moran during the 1871 expedition and included in the report include a number of watercolors that were made for the purpose of showing the intense colors of Yellowstone’s geological features like steam vents and sulfur pools. These watercolors were so well-received that four years after Hayden’s report was published, Boston’s Louis Prang (1824–1909) commissioned a collection of full-color chromolithographs based on the watercolors, sold individually and in a bound collection.197 Hayden wrote the introduction to the Prang Commission and stated of Moran’s images,

To a person who has not visited the Yellowstone and the territory adjacent to it, it is simply impossible to conceive of the character of the scenery, and even the most vivid description is utterly insufficient to give an accurate idea of it, unless accompanied by color illustrations.198

This statement by Hayden—who in the rest of his introduction described the geological characteristics of the locations and features Moran’s images showed—confirms the realistic representation of the landscapes, and the importance of including Moran in the expedition in the first place.

One of the geyser watercolors Moran made during Hayden’s survey is The Castle Geyser in the Upper Geyser Basin, which shows two of Yellowstone’s geothermal

features—a hot spring and a geyser. This watercolor was included in Hayden’s report to show the spectacular color of the hot springs and a geyser in action. It was the watercolors in the report that encouraged Prang to commission a collection of chromolithographs, which in addition to being distributed as a collection, were also exhibited in galleries.\textsuperscript{199} While Moran’s watercolors, woodblock engravings, and paintings were instrumental in the protection of Yellowstone, they were not the only influential materials produced from the Hayden expedition.

Seeing Yellowstone in Color & Black and White

Even though Moran was not the only artist in the survey, he was the only artist who was producing color images. Other images included in Hayden’s report to Congress were geological sketches made by Henry Elliott (1846–1930), official survey artist who primarily made geological sketches, and photographs by William Henry Jackson, the survey photographer. After establishing his own photography studio in Omaha, Nebraska in 1869, Jackson began taking portraits for everyone in the Omaha area, including Native Americans. That year he also took a tour of the newly completed Union Pacific Railroad, and took a number of landscape photographs that he brought back to Omaha later that year. During his railroad tour he met Ferdinand Hayden for the first time, which lead to a visit by Hayden to Jackson’s Omaha studio the following year.\textsuperscript{200} During this visit, Hayden asked Jackson to join the survey team he was organizing, offering him no pay, but covered expenses for travel and photography equipment. Jackson agreed to accompany Hayden and his team on their trip to Yellowstone, which resulted in some of

\textsuperscript{199} Clark, \textit{Thomas Moran}, 33.

the most popular photographs of his career, as well as images influential in the establishment of Yellowstone National Park.²⁰¹

Both Jackson’s *Castle Geyser and Crested Pool, Upper Geyser Basin, 1871* and Thomas Moran’s *The Castle Geyser in the Upper Geyser Basin* were included in the report Hayden presented to Congress, which also included comprehensive descriptions of the many diverse geological features and makeup of the area. Jackson’s photograph and Moran’s watercolor provided their shared viewers two distinct perspectives of Yellowstone that together allowed for a more dynamic understanding of the landscape. The photograph shows Crested Pool in the exact center of the frame, with Castle Geyser directly behind it. The two geothermal features are composed so that other than the additional geyser just to the right of Castle Geyser, the image is nearly symmetrical. The main focus of the photograph is Crested Pool. After the eye travels the rim of the pool it settles on the Castle Geyser, whose outline is emphasized by the silhouetted trees that also reveal the crisp horizon line.

The detail captured in Jackson’s photograph of one of the most unique landscapes in the American West is its impressive strength. The foreground of the image shows the high-contrast texture of the salt crust that has formed around the perimeter of the pool. This level of detail is unequaled in any paintings or drawings produced by Moran of Yellowstone by nature of the medium. The camera only requires the image of the subject to be reflected onto a light-sensitive surface, whereas a painting requires the artist’s hand to represent each detail one at a time. The mechanization of the camera allowed Jackson to capture documentary evidence of the never-before-seen geological features of Yellowstone’s hot springs. This was valuable to Hayden’s report because before his

²⁰¹ Ibid., 196.
survey, no photographs of Yellowstone had ever been taken;\textsuperscript{202} the detail of the photographs proved helpful to Congress’ understanding of the area as one not suitable for development. Scientific and documentary as his photographs for the Hayden expedition were, they were also discerningly composed and perceptively timed. \textit{Castle Geyser and Crested Pool} is almost abstract in its symmetry—bringing a sense of order and simplicity to an area of seemingly chaotic geological mysteries.

The one feature Jackson’s photographs lacked was color. The brilliant colors of hot springs like Crested Pool add beauty to their fascinating geology, and contributed to the rumors of Yellowstone’s strange characteristics leading up to Hayden’s survey. As an early visitor to Yellowstone recorded in his journal,

At length we came to a boiling Lake about 300 ft in diameter forming nearly a complete circle as we approached on the South side. The steam which arose from it was of three distinct Colors from the west side for one third of the diameter it was white, in the middle it was pale red, and the remaining third on the east light sky blue. Whether it was something peculiar in the state of the atmosphere the day being cloudy or whether it was some Chemical properties contained in the water which produced this phenomenon. I am unable to say and shall leave the explanation to some scientific tourist who may have the Curiosity to visit this place at some future period—The water was of deep indigo blue boiling like an immense cauldron running over the white rock which had formed [round] the edges to the height of 4 or 5 feet from the surface of the earth sloping gradually for 60 or 70 feet. What a field of speculation this presents for chemist and geologist.\textsuperscript{203}

Accounts like these contributed to the rumors of the mysterious Yellowstone, awarding it the nickname “Colter’s Hell,” after John Colter (c.1774–1813), a member of the Louis

\textsuperscript{202}Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{203}Aubrey L. Haines, \textit{Osborne Russell’s Journal of a Trapper} (Portland, Oregon: Champoeg Press, 1955); reprinted, by special arrangement with the Oregon Historical Society, in 1965 in a Bison Book edition by the University of Nebraska Press.
and Clark expedition, who remained in the western part of the continent after the rest of the team returned to the east.\textsuperscript{204} The visitor who recorded the above remarks visited Yellowstone about thirty years after Colter, in 1839, but the colorful mystery of the natural boiling “cauldron” was not resolved for another thirty years, when the Hayden survey made visual and scientific recordings of all the geological features they encountered.\textsuperscript{205} The colors are created by microorganisms that thrive only in the extreme temperatures of geothermally active locations such as hot springs and deep-sea hydrothermal vents. The relationships between the organisms and pigments that act as filters for sun, combined with the reflection of the sky in the deep, boiling water create the perfect environment for a full spectrum of color.\textsuperscript{206} Moran expertly recreated these powerful colors of nature using his watercolor palate that consisted of cerulean to indigo, bright yellow to fiery red. Without the impeccable detail in Jackson’s photographs and the comprehensive color in Moran’s paintings, neither the general public nor the government officials would have been able to imagine what Yellowstone was like. These images, which were used as promotion for the area even after it became a National Park, served as the evidence of a once-rumored destination that held the potential for great economic growth when paired with railroad travel, which finally reached the park in 1883.\textsuperscript{207}

\textsuperscript{204} Haines, \textit{Yellowstone National Park}, 52.
\textsuperscript{205} Hayden, \textit{Report to the Committee}.
\textsuperscript{207} Runte, \textit{National Parks}, 63.
Conclusion

Hayden’s report, complete with photographs and color reproductions of watercolors and sketches, provided Congress with as complete a picture of Yellowstone’s landscape as they could without actually visiting in person. This disparate collection of images was included in the portfolio along with Hayden’s geological observations and other party members’ descriptions of the area. Hayden’s portfolio report was presented to Congress in 1872, when the Nation had reached an important moment in conservation history. It had been over fifty years since the U.S. government allowed Niagara Falls to succumb to the desires of profiteers, and because of that, nearly lost the nation’s primary, once pristine, natural wonder and gained criticism from Europe. The Niagara mistake was finally dealt with seven years after Yellowstone was protected for public use. A commission was issued in the 1879 for the government to buy back land that had been used for commercial purposes, so the creation of a natural reserve could restore the original majesty of the area. Frederic Law Olmsted, first commissioner of Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove, was commissioned once again to design a public park on the American side of Niagara falls—a reserve, where there had previously only been tourist attractions accessible by paying a fee.\textsuperscript{208}

This gesture, which followed the protection of Yellowstone, was symbolic and representative of a shift that had occurred over the course of less than a century regarding the environment and land protection. By 1879, the United States had established the first National Park, the first State Park, and bought back land to correct the internationally-criticized oversight of Niagara Falls. The distinct differentiating approach between

Yellowstone and the land protection models of Yosemite and Niagara, was the
government’s decision to finally take preemptive action, rather than acting after private
interests had already established a presence in the area ultimately protected. The
government’s decision to fund the Hayden expedition, which resulted in Hayden’s
comprehensive portfolio report, was the successful approach that could not have occurred
without the preceding experiences of the failure at Niagara and the government land
protection trial at Yosemite.

Although favored styles and theories of art have since evolved and the National
Parks system has enjoyed over one hundred years of further development and land
protection, Thomas Moran’s *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* still hangs in the
Department of the Interior in the nation’s capitol. Today—after returning to public view
this year, following a period of building construction—the painting serves as a reminder
not only of the beginning of one of our greatest legislative creations, but also of a time
when voices across various disciplines agreed that protecting this particular section of
land was so important, that it should be decreed inalienable for all of time. While the
story of Yellowstone National Park is long, detailed, and includes more names and stories
than can fit in any book, the consideration of images and the artists who created them is
essential in order to reveal the ways in which Americans’ reactions to Yellowstone
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