Nature and Nostalgia in the Art of Mary Nimmo Moran (1842-1899)

Shannon Vittoria

Graduate Center, City University of New York

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NATURE AND NOSTALGIA IN THE ART OF MARY NIMMO MORAN (1842-1899)

by

SHANNON VITTORIA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Katherine Manthorne

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Rachel Kousser

Date

Executive Officer

Patricia Mainardi

Sally Webster

Helena E. Wright
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

NATURE AND NOSTALGIA IN THE ART OF MARY NIMMO MORAN (1842-1899)

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Adviser: Professor Katherine Manthorne

This dissertation is the first comprehensive study dedicated to the work of American painter-etcher Mary Nimmo Moran (1842-1899), an innovative printmaker and influential interpreter of the American landscape. She began her career in 1863, studying drawing and painting with her husband, artist Thomas Moran (1837-1926). Throughout the 1870s, she exhibited works at both the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design, and published wood engraved illustrations in books and popular monthly magazines. Yet it was in the medium of etching that she achieved her greatest recognition: between 1879 and her untimely death in 1899, she executed an extensive oeuvre of expressively etched, tonal landscapes that nostalgically preserve America’s agrarian past as it was beginning to disappear.

Working primarily in East Hampton, Long Island – where she and Thomas Moran built a home-studio in 1884 – she also traveled extensively throughout her career etching landscapes of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Florida, California, Scotland, and Wales. Her technical expertise and inventive approach to printmaking, which included experiments with tools, techniques, inks, and papers, placed her at the forefront of the etching revival – a movement that aimed to promote original etching as the preeminent medium capable of conveying personal, autographic expression. Nimmo Moran was a major contributor to this popular and influential movement, which began in France and England in the 1860s, before reaching its height in the United States in the 1880s. She was the first woman elected to both the New York Etching Club and London’s
Society of Painter-Etchers, and her prints were widely exhibited and critically acclaimed in cities across the United States and in Europe.

While her skilled and innovative works placed her on the cutting edge of American printmaking, this dissertation argues that Nimmo Moran used the newly revived medium of etching to promote a nostalgic vision of nature. I contend that her etchings visually preserve the landscape of America’s eastern seaboard, idealizing a pastoral past in the face of an increasingly industrialized present. As a result, her etchings appealed to an urban clientele, satisfying their growing demand for original, expressive, and affordable works of art, while also providing visual respite for those seeking to escape the complexities of modern-industrial life. I analyze her landscape aesthetic amidst the rise of American Tonalism, revealing the ways in which she deftly manipulated the etching medium to create harmonious tones in monochrome. Her oeuvre thus illustrates the importance of etching to the development of the Tonalist aesthetic in American painting, printmaking, and photography at the end of the nineteenth century.
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Figure 5.24. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Between the Sand Dunes* (second state), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 4-1/2 x 7 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.85J).

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Figure 5.27. Mary Nimmo Moran, “'Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame,” 1883. Etching, plate dims. 7-1/2 x 11-1/2 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, John S. Phillips Fund Purchase (1985.16.37).

Figure 5.28. Mary Nimmo Moran, Trial proof of “'Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame,” 1883. Etching, plate dims. 7-1/2 x 11-1/2 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa Oklahoma (1426.92H).

Figure 5.29. Mary Nimmo Moran, Evening, Easthampton with detail (first state), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 7-5/8 x 4-1/2. National Museum of American History, Division of Graphic Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Stephen J. Ferris (14773.1).

Figure 5.30. Mary Nimmo Moran, Evening, Easthampton with detail (second state), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 7-5/8 x 4-1/2. Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Littlejohn Collection (1956.47.6).

Figure 5.31. Mary Nimmo Moran, Evening, Easthampton (second state), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 7-5/8 x 4-1/2. Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of T. Harrison Garrett (1946.112.12804).

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Figure 5.51. Mary Nimmo Moran, Preparatory study for *An Old Homestead, Easthampton, L.I.*, n.d. (likely 1880). Graphite on paper, dimensions unknown. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1326.529).

Figure 5.52. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Summer, Easthampton* (first state), 1883. Etching, plate dims. 11-3/8 x 9-1/4 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.91F).
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Figure 5.59. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Round Pond, Bridgehampton, L.I.* (second state), 1884. Etching, plate dims. 10 x 11-1/2 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.97B).

Figure 5.60. Mary Nimmo Moran, *A Stormy Evening, Easthampton* (first state), 1883. Etching with graphite additions, plate dims. 9-1/2 x 11 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.96D).

Figure 5.61. Mary Nimmo Moran, *A Stormy Evening, Easthampton* (second state), 1883. Etching, plate dims. 9-1/2 x 11 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.96E).

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CHAPTER 6

Figure 6.1. Mary Nimmo Moran, Twilight, Easthampton (small plate), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 3 x 5-1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. (1973.122.54).

Figure 6.2. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Summer, Easthampton* (small plate), 1884. Etching, plate dims. 5-5/8 x 3-3/8 in. New York Public Library, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs.
Figure 6.3. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Hook Pond, Easthampton* (small plate), 1884. Etching, plate dims. 3-3/8 x 5-9/16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Collection, transferred from the Library, 1921 (21.36.58(12)).


Figure 6.5. Mary Nimmo Moran, *The Passaic Meadows* (small plate), 1881. Etching, plate dims. 5-1/2 x 8-3/4 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Collection, transferred from the Library, 1921 (21.36.57(6)).

Figure 6.6. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Twilight, Easthampton*, 1881. Etching, plate dims. 7-3/4 x 11-3/4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Purchased from the Everett Statue Fund (M432).

Figure 6.7. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Conway Castle, Wales*, 1882. Etching, plate dims. 6-1/2 x 9-1/2 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1948 (48.54.40).


Figure 6.9. Mary Nimmo Moran, *A Wooded Landscape (after T. Moran)*, 1886. Etching, plate dims. 5-3/4 x 7-3/4 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.121C).

Figure 6.10. Mary Nimmo Moran, *The Edge of the Forest (after T. Moran)*, 1886. Etching, plate dims. 7-7/8 x 5-3/4 in. The Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York (1956.47.3D).


Figure 6.12. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Lane near Fontainebleau (after N. Diaz)*, 1886. Etching, plate dims. 5-3/8 x 7 in. Private Collection, Baltimore.

Figure 6.13. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Landscape (after T. Rousseau)*, 1888. Etching, plate dims. 4-1/2 x 7-1/2 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.103C).


Figure 6.18. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Where Through the Willows Creaking Loud, Is Heard the Busy Mill* (first state), 1886. Etching, plate dims. 19-1/2 x 29-1/2 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.117B).

Figure 6.19. Mary Nimmo Moran, *Where Through the Willows Creaking Loud, Is Heard the Busy Mill* (second state), 1886. Etching, plate dims. 19-1/2 x 29-1/2 in. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.117K).

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Figure 6.27. Mary Nimmo Moran, *The Garden Path, Easthampton*, 1894. Oil on panel, 9-1/2 x 13-1/2 in. Private Collection.


Figure 6.29. Mary Nimmo Moran in her East Hampton Flower Garden, 1884. Photograph, dimensions unknown. Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.

Figure 6.30. Mary Nimmo Moran, *In Dr. Edward Osborn’s Garden*, 1895. Oil on panel, dimensions unknown. East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.

Figure 6.32. Childe Hassam, *The Old Mulford House (Easthampton)*, 1926. Etching, plate dims. 8 3/8 x 10 13/16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Childe Hassam (40.30.15).

Figure 6.33. John Sloan, *Fun, One Cent*, 1905. Etching, plate dims. 4-15/16 x 6-7/8 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney (26.30.20).

Figure 6.34. Moran Family Monument. South End Cemetery, East Hampton, Long Island Photograph by the author, 2014.

Figure 6.35. Thomas Moran, *The Old Bridge Over Hook Pond, Easthampton, Long Island*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 20-1/4 x 30-1/4 in. Private Collection.
INTRODUCTION

“The High-Water Mark of Etching in America”

In December 1882, the Philadelphia Society of Etchers organized its first annual exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The show featured more than one thousand etchings by American and European artists, including seventeen prints by Mary Nimmo Moran (American, 1842-1899). In his introduction to the exhibition’s catalogue, noted critic Sylvester Rosa Koehler explained that the show was “devoted exclusively to painters’ etchings, that is to say, all the works here shown were executed by the artists who conceived them, without the intervention of an engraver. They are, in fact, original works of art, quite as much as the oil paintings and watercolors, which graced these walls a month ago...The charm of the painters’ etching lies in this originality. It allows us to see the individuality of the artist without obscuration of any sort.”

Founded in April 1880, the Philadelphia Society of Etchers aimed to promote original etching as a fine art capable of rivaling the expressive potential of painting in oil and watercolor. The society was initially composed of eight active members, nine non-resident members, and seven honorary members, all of whom were male. When presented with the nomination of a female member, artist Mary Jett Franklin (American, 1842-1928), the Etchers voted down an amendment to permit the election of women artists, barring their official membership in the society. Women could nevertheless exhibit prints in the Etchers’ annual

2 In contrast to a reproductive print, which is produced after a work of art in another medium, an original print is conceived of and realized by an artist as an original composition. The distinction between reproductive and original etching (also known as painter-etching) is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.
exhibitions and Mary Nimmo Moran was one of five female artists – including her sister-in-law Emily Kelley Moran (American, 1841-1903), Harriet Frances Osborne (American, 1846-1913), Blanche Dillaye (American, 1851-1931), and Anna Lea Merritt (American, 1844-1930) – who displayed original etchings in the society’s first show.4

Following the opening of the exhibition, art critic and educator Leslie W. Miller published a two-part article on the state of American etching in the Philadelphia-based periodical The Continent. In his article, Miller singled out Nimmo Moran’s prints for praise:

The work of Mrs. Mary Nimmo Moran demands particular notice. I doubt whether in the work of any etcher in America or in Europe are to be found more painter-like qualities than hers exhibit, and if I were asked to select the etching by an American artist which exhibited these qualities in the greatest profusion, I should unhesitatingly name her ‘Twilight at Easthampton’...I am inclined to regard such work as this as about the high-water mark of etching in America.5

Twilight, Easthampton (1880, figure I.1) was among the seventeen etchings she displayed in the first annual exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Etchers. The work depicts a sandy path winding its way amidst the trees and shadows of eastern Long Island. As the sun sets below the horizon, a soft, atmospheric haze settles over the landscape as day turns to night and light fades to darkness. Combining a variety of etching techniques – including the roulette, Scotch stone, retoussage, and plate tone – she created subtle tonal variations throughout, pushing the conventional boundaries of the medium to produce an image that is intimate and expressive, poetic and personal.6

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4 While Mary Nimmo Moran was represented by seventeen etchings (cat. nos. 182-198), Emily Kelley Moran was represented by six (cat. nos. 142-143), Harriet Frances Osborne by five (cat. nos. 227-229), Blanche Dillaye by one (cat. no. 35), and Anna Lea Merritt by one (cat. no. 1061). Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Etchers, 7, 9-10, and 24.
5 L[eslie]W. Miller, “An Art for Enthusiasts – II,” The Continent 3, no. 5 (January 31, 1883): 139. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, when referring to Mary Nimmo Moran I will use her maiden and married name, Nimmo Moran, which was the professional name she used throughout her career.
6 The roulette is composed of a toothed wheel on a handle, which can be run over a grounded or ungrounded etching plate to produce patterns of small dots that hold ink and print as gradated tone. The Scotch stone, in contrast, is an abrasive stick used to grind away areas of the plate, leaving behind a series of fine scratches, which when inked and
Nimmo Moran began etching in 1879, only one year prior to producing this plate, yet the work reveals her technical mastery of the medium and painterly approach to printmaking. In 1880, Koehler proclaimed *Twilight* to be “a plate of extraordinary power and beauty,” arguing that “alone [it] would be sufficient to establish the artist’s claim to rank among the masters of landscape etching.” The work was later selected to serve as the frontispiece to the *Exhibition Catalogue of the Work of the Women Etchers of America*, on view at the Union League Club, New York, in April 1888. Organized by Koehler, this historic exhibition featured 509 etchings by thirty-five artists and it was the first show dedicated solely to the work of female American printmakers. Nimmo Moran was represented by fifty-six etchings – more than any other artist – and critics praised this display of her “truly remarkable oeuvre,” securing her reputation as “easily first among the women etchers.”

Born in Scotland in 1842, Mary Nimmo immigrated to the United States at the age of ten. Her family settled in northeastern Philadelphia, where she met an aspiring young artist by the name of Thomas Moran (American, 1837-1926). The two married in 1863, after which she learned to draw and paint from her husband. Following a year of study in England, France, and Italy, she returned to the United States making her professional debut at the Pennsylvania printed create areas of tone. *Retroussage* is achieved when a soft cloth is run over an inked plate, drawing up the ink and softening the etched lines, while plate tone is a method in which a thin film of ink is left on the surface of the plate and judiciously wiped to create areas of light and shadow. These printmaking tools and techniques are described in greater detail in Chapters Four and Five.

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8 This exhibition opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on November 1, 1887, before an expanded version of the show traveled to the Union League Club, New York, in April 1888. In Boston, the exhibition featured 413 prints by twenty-five women artists, including fifty-four etchings by Mary Nimmo Moran; however, the accompanying catalogue was not illustrated. On the history of the exhibition’s organization and reception in both Boston and New York, see Phyllis Peet, *American Women of the Etching Revival* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1988), 9-11 and Phyllis Peet, “The Emergence of American Women Printmakers in the Late Nineteenth Century” (Los Angeles: Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1987), 292-303.
Academy of the Fine Arts, where she exhibited a landscape painting in 1869. Throughout the 1870s, she publicly exhibited works at both the Pennsylvania Academy and the National Academy of Design, and she produced wood engraved illustrations that were published in books and popular monthly magazines.

Yet it was in the medium of etching that she achieved her greatest recognition: between 1879 and 1889, she executed an extensive oeuvre of expressively etched, tonal landscapes that nostalgically preserve America’s agrarian past as it was beginning to disappear as a result of the nation’s rapid industrialization. Working primarily in East Hampton, Long Island – where she and Thomas Moran built the town’s first permanent artists’ home-studio in 1884 – she also traveled extensively throughout her career, etching landscapes of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Florida, California, Scotland, and Wales. Her technical expertise and inventive approach to printmaking, which included experiments with tools, techniques, inks, and papers, placed her at the forefront of the etching revival – a movement that aimed to promote original etching as the preeminent medium capable of conveying personal, autographic expression.

Nimmo Moran was a major contributor to this popular and influential movement, which began in France and England in the 1860s, reaching its height in the United States in the 1880s. She was the first woman elected to both the New York Etching Club and London’s Society of Painter-Etchers, and her prints were widely exhibited in cities across the United States and in Europe. Influential art critics including Miller, Koehler, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, Alfred Trumble, and Frank Weitenkampf admired the bold and painterly qualities of her etchings, which they praised for embodying the expressive potential of the original print. Her works were published in luxury print portfolios, illustrated auction catalogues, and popular periodicals; sold by prominent art dealers, such as Frederick Keppel and Christian Klackner; and
collected by noteworthy patrons, including Samuel Putnam Avery, T. Harrison Garrett, and John Ruskin. By 1884, English author and women’s rights activist Emily Faithfull could confidently assert that, “from Mr. Ruskin downwards we recognise that in Mrs. Nimmo Morant [sic], New York possesses the best woman etcher of the day.”

**Historiography**

Although renowned during her lifetime, Nimmo Moran has been overlooked in much of the literature on American art. Following her untimely death from typhoid fever in 1899, the artist’s reputation dwindled: while husband Thomas Moran and daughter Ruth Bedford Moran (American, 1870-1948) continued to exhibit her prints into the second decade of the twentieth century, by the 1980s her life and work were all but forgotten, constituting not more than a footnote in the scholarship on Thomas Moran. In the summer 1950, Jacob Kainen, the Smithsonian Institution’s Curator of Graphic Arts, had attempted to stimulate interest in the artist’s work by organizing a memorial exhibition of her prints at the U.S. National Museum. The show included twenty-eight etchings executed between 1879 and 1885, all of which were drawn from the Museum’s permanent collection. In an accompanying press release, Kainen described Nimmo Moran as “one of the few American etchers to work in a free, unhackneyed vein and one

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10 Emily Faithful, *Three Visits to America* (New York: Fowler & Wells Co., 1884), 293.
12 This exhibition was part of the Smithsonian’s Special Exhibition Program, which ran from 1923 into the 1960s. The program was managed by curators Ruel Tolman (1923-1946) and Jacob Kainen (1946-1960s), who organized group and solo exhibitions of contemporary prints to advance the public’s knowledge of graphic art. On the history of the Smithsonian’s Special Exhibition Program, see Helena E. Wright, “A National Audience for Prints: The Smithsonian’s Special Exhibition Program, 1923-1948,” in *North American Prints, 1913-1947: An Examination at Century's End*, ed. David Tatham (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 26-59.
of the few first-rate printmakers to remain in this country.” Yet he astutely recognized that “in recent years, while she has continued to be appreciated abroad as an outstanding American printmaker, of her period, print connoisseurs and critics here seem to be losing contact with her work. The present exhibition may spark new interest in it.”

Despite Kainen’s efforts to reconnect American audiences with her work, Nimmo Moran’s etchings likely appeared old-fashioned and out-of-touch with the concerns and aesthetics of contemporary printmaking. Her intimate, small-scale, monochromatic landscapes were the antithesis of the bold, colorful, abstract prints produced in the 1940s and 1950s by artists such as Anne Ryan (American, 1889-1954), Sue Fuller (American, 1914-2006), and Worden Day (American, 1912-1986). After the Smithsonian’s exhibition, Nimmo Moran’s etchings received little scholarly attention until the early 1980s, when the rise of feminist art history sparked a new and sustained interest in women’s work.

As art historians began to “rediscover” forgotten female artists of the past, Nimmo Moran became a subject of interest: in 1983, Marilyn Francis published a brief but informative article outlining major milestones in the artist’s life and career. The following year, the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, now the Gilcrease Museum, mounted an exhibition of Nimmo Moran etchings – the first in nearly thirty-five years. The Gilcrease Museum holds the most extensive collection of the artist’s work, comprised of more than 350

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13 Jacob Kainen, press release for “a memorial exhibition of etchings by Mary Nimmo Moran (1842-1899), to be on view in the Print Gallery of the Smithsonian Building from June 26 through September 4, 1950.” Special Exhibition Files, Graphic Arts Collection, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.


16 Anne Morand and Nancy Friese, Prints of Nature: Poetic Etchings of Mary Nimmo Moran (Tulsa: University of Tulsa, 1984).
etchings, including trial proofs, artist’s proofs, bon à tirer proofs, and printer’s proofs, as well as cancelled copper plates, sketchbooks, drawings, and watercolors.  

The Gilcrease exhibition focused exclusively on her career as an etcher, yet it provided the most comprehensive display of her prints since her first retrospective with husband Thomas Moran in 1889. A concise catalogue accompanied the show with essays by art historian Anne Morand and printmaker Nancy Friese. Their research unearthed important details pertaining to the artist’s biography and etching technique, which Friese argues is “marked by energetic emphasis rather than delicacy or smoothness…The impression Mary Nimmo Moran gives in her working proofs and notations and final prints is one free of artifice and full of natural ambition.” Together with Francis’s research, Morand and Friese established a strong foundation for subsequent investigations into the artist’s career.

In 1988, art historian Phyllis Peet curated American Women of the Etching Revival at the High Museum of Art to commemorate the centennial of Koehler’s Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America. Nimmo Moran’s prints were prominently featured in Peet’s exhibition and catalogue, which drew on the research of her doctoral dissertation “The


18 Held at the Christian Klackner Gallery at 5 East 17th Street in New York City, this retrospective exhibition included sixty etchings by Mary Nimmo Moran and seventy-three etchings by Thomas Moran, as well as an etched portrait of Thomas Moran by artist Stephen J. Ferris (American, 1835-1915). For a complete list of the works on display, see Christian Klackner, A Catalogue of the Complete Etched Works of Thomas Moran, N.A. and M. Nimmo Moran, S.P.E., on Exhibition at C. Klackner’s (New York: Klackner Gallery, 1889).

19 Nancy Friese, “The Art of Mary Nimmo Moran,” in Morand and Friese, 16 and 25.

20 The exhibition opened at the High Museum of Art in February 1988, before traveling to the Woodmere Art Museum, the Hudson River Museum of Westchester, and the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. For the full tour itinerary, see Peet, American Women of the Etching Revival, 2.
Emergence of American Women Printmakers in the Late Nineteenth Century." Unlike earlier analyses of Nimmo Moran’s work, Peet contextualized the artist’s career – and those of her female contemporaries working in lithography, wood engraving, etching, mezzotint, and photography – amidst the changing social, historical, and educational structures that enabled American women to pursue printmaking professionally.

Peet’s research has greatly contributed to our understanding of the prominent role women played in the development of American graphic art at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet when discussing the careers of individual artists such as Nimmo Moran, Peet compares her prints solely to those of her female contemporaries, isolating her work from the male artists with whom she originally exhibited. By examining Nimmo Moran’s work in a separate “feminine” sphere, Peet reinforces much of the nineteenth century’s critical rhetoric that described the artist as “easily best among the women etchers,” when, as it will be argued, she was easily best among all American etchers – male or female.

In addition to the growing interest in the work of women artists, the 1980s witnessed a renewed interest in nineteenth-century American etching, notably the prints produced by artists working in the United States in the 1880s. Previously, the etchings of expatriate artists, such as Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926) and James McNeill Whistler (American, 1834-1903), dominated perceptions of historical American etching. However, as art historians Rona Schneider, Francine Tyler, and Thomas Bruhn have illustrated, there was a vibrant and widely popular etching movement thriving in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1982, Schneider outlined the origins of this movement, which she argues was influenced not only

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by contemporary British printmaking – notably the works of Whistler and his brother-in-law Francis Seymour Haden (English, 1818-1910) – but also by the etchings of Barbizon School artists in France. Moreover, Tyler and Bruhn have revealed an extensive network of American artists, printers, publishers, critics, and collectors who worked together to foster the movement’s success and popularity over time.

Exhibitions dedicated to historical American etching also flourished in the 1980s, as museum curators aimed to highlight the variety of work produced in the United States during this period. Several of these exhibitions included Nimmo Moran’s etchings, which were displayed alongside the prints of her contemporaries, including Thomas Moran, Peter Moran (American, 1841-1914), Henry Farrer (American, 1844-1903), R. Swain Gifford (American, 1840-1905), William Merritt Chase (American, 1849-1916), Stephen Parrish (American, 1846-1938), Samuel Colman (American, 1832-1920), and Charles Adams Platt (American, 1861-1933), among several others. Despite this spate of interest in Nimmo Moran’s prints in the 1980s, she remains a relatively unknown figure in the history of American art, as there is no monograph or catalogue raisonné dedicated to her work. In contrast, the careers of Thomas and Peter Moran, as well as

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23 Rona Schneider, “The American Etching Revival: Its French Sources and Early Years,” *The American Art Journal* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 40-65. Although Schneider examines the influence of Barbizon printmaking upon American etchers, her essay does not consider the work of Mary Nimmo Moran despite the artist’s travels to France, notably to the Forest of Fontainebleau, and the influence of the Romantic aesthetic upon her etched impressions of the American landscape.


26 Mary Nimmo Moran was the only female artist included in O’Brien and Mandel, *The American Painter-Etcher Movement* and Bruhn, *American Etching: The 1880s*. Additional etchings by Anna Lea Merritt, Blanche Dillaye, and Gabrielle de Veaux Clements (American, 1858-1948) were included in O’Brien and Mandel, *Nineteenth Century American Etchings in the Collection of the Parrish Art Museum* and Schneider, *American Painter Etchings, 1853-1908*. 
those of Chase, Gifford, Parrish, and Platt have generated extensive scholarly research and numerous publications in the past twenty-five years.²⁷

Moreover, recent literature on the nineteenth-century etching revival has focused overwhelmingly on its manifestations in France and England.²⁸ When American etching is considered – as it was in the Smart Museum of Art’s 2008 exhibition The “Writing” of Modern Life: The Etching Revival in France, Britain, and the U.S., 1850-1940 – scholars continue to privilege etchings by nineteenth-century expatriate artists, as well as those executed in the early twentieth century.²⁹ The “Writing” of Modern Life, for instance, featured etchings by Whistler, Martin Lewis (American, 1881-1962), and Ernest David Roth (American, 1879-1964), yet did not include a single etching by Mary Nimmo Moran or, for that matter, a single etching executed in the United States prior to 1900. Yet, as this dissertation will demonstrate, Nimmo Moran’s current status in the history of American art is not indicative of the success and recognition she achieved during her lifetime, nor does it reflect the importance of her bold, painterly, and inventive etchings to the development of the Tonalist aesthetic in American painting, printmaking, and photography at the end of the nineteenth century.


**A Tale of Two Marys: Mary Nimmo Moran and Mary Cassatt**

In order to understand how and why Mary Nimmo Moran remains an unknown figure in American art history, it is useful to compare her career and posthumous reputation to that of the well-known female American printmaker Mary Cassatt. Although they began their lives on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean – Mary Nimmo was born in Scotland in 1842, while Mary Cassatt was born in Pennsylvania in 1844 – their paths crossed on several occasions.\(^\text{30}\)

Both women received formative art training in Philadelphia in the early 1860s: while Cassatt was enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Nimmo Moran was studying in the Philadelphia studio of husband Thomas Moran. In December 1865, Cassatt traveled to Paris, where she studied for the next four years. Approximately six months later, in summer 1866, Nimmo Moran arrived in Paris, where she and Moran rented a studio for nine months. It is currently unknown if Nimmo Moran and Cassatt met overseas; however, the community of American artists in Paris was relatively close and an encounter is certainly possible. Nimmo Moran’s time abroad was significantly shorter than Cassatt’s, yet the lessons each artist learned had a lasting, albeit drastically different, impact on their careers.

Cassatt returned to Philadelphia in 1870, settling into her family’s home at 23 South Street approximately two and a half miles southeast of Nimmo Moran’s residence at 1812 Wood Street.\(^\text{31}\) There is no known correspondence between the two women, but they traveled in the same artistic circles: in fall 1870, Cassatt met artist Emily Sartain (American, 1841-1927), the daughter of engraver John Sartain (American, 1808-1897) and the younger sister of artist Samuel Sartain (American, 1830-1906). The Sartains and the Morans had long been acquainted in Philadelphia: in 1860, Thomas Moran and Samuel Sartain shared a studio, where John Sartain


first demonstrated the etching process for Moran, who in turn taught the process to his wife. Cassatt’s initial exposure to the graphic arts was similarly through the Sartain family, notably the reproductive engravings of John Sartain and the mezzotints of Emily Sartain, with whom Cassatt traveled to Europe in 1871.32

Cassatt eventually settled in Paris in 1874 and she was subsequently invited to join the Impressionists by artist Edgar Degas, first exhibiting with the group in their fourth annual exhibition in 1879. At the time, Nimmo Moran was living with her family in Newark, New Jersey, where she and Thomas Moran established a home-studio in 1871. While in Newark, she continued to paint landscapes in oil and watercolor, exhibiting her first work *Autumnal Twilight* (ca. 1877, current location unknown) at the National Academy of Design in 1877.33 Despite their exposure to the graphic arts, neither Nimmo Moran nor Cassatt initially pursued printmaking, instead dedicating their artistic efforts primarily to painting.

Quite coincidently, both artists began seriously etching in 1879: in the summer, Nimmo Moran etched her first copper plate depicting the landscape of the Delaware Water Gap near Easton, Pennsylvania; in the fall, Cassatt began etching in the Parisian atelier of Edgar Degas, producing prints for publication in the proposed journal *Le Jour et la nuit*.34 Over the course of the next decade, both artists pursued printmaking as an integral component of their artistic practices. While Cassatt remained in Paris, Nimmo Moran split her time between a winter studio

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in New York City and a summer studio in East Hampton. Despite the geographic distance that separated the two, they simultaneously produced innovative etchings that collectively reveal their bold and experimental approaches to the medium.

Although they focused on markedly different subjects – Nimmo Moran captured the landscape of America’s eastern seaboard, while Cassatt focused on modern women and children – each artist explored the painterly potential of printmaking tools, techniques, and processes in pursuit of originality. Art historian Nancy Mowll Mathews notes that Cassatt “went from painting to printmaking and brought with her a love of the manipulable surface and variety in tone and texture…she was willing to draw, paint, dust, heat, bite, and scrape the plate to force from it the extended range of expression she knew was possible from her work in other media.”

In *The Visitor* (ca. 1881, figure I.2), for example, Cassatt combined etching with soft-ground, aquatint, and drypoint to reproduce light effects and subtle tonal variations throughout. She also pressed a piece of fabric into the grounded copper plate, transferring the pattern of the fabric to the image in order to recreate the textural nuances of clothing and drapery.

Similarly, in *Twilight, Easthampton* (figure I.1), Nimmo Moran deftly combined etching with the roulette, Scotch stone, *retoussage*, and plate tone to capture the shifting effects of light and atmosphere upon the scene. She also paid close attention to textural variety, running sandpaper over the grounded copper plate to produce the granular appearance of sand and soil. She did not utilize soft-ground or aquatint, but often employed drypoint and experimented extensively with creative wiping and ink manipulation. Like Cassatt, she was particularly attuned to the importance of process, reworking compositions over multiple states and often intentionally leaving visible imperfections or “mistakes” on the surface of the plate.

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35 Mathews and Shapiro, 27.
In the last decade of her life, Nimmo Moran abandoned etching and returned to oil painting. Cassatt, however, continued producing prints in the 1890s, executing some of her most influential graphic works in color. Following an 1898 exhibition of her color etchings in New York, a critic in *The Art Amateur* described her works as “among the most delightful color prints of our time… she may be said to have made her own to such a degree that it would be temerarious for any one to dispute the field with her.”\(^{36}\) If Nimmo Moran had lived into the next century, then one can only wonder if she may have experimented further with the expressive possibilities of etching, possibly in color, in order to “dispute the field.”

Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Cassatt has been widely celebrated for her innovative and experimental approach to printmaking. Her works have been the subject of extensive art historical analysis, giving rise to a vast body of scholarship on the artist.\(^{37}\) Her prints fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars at auction and are regularly featured in high-profile exhibitions, including most recently *Daring Methods: The Prints of Mary Cassatt* at the New York Public Library (2013) and *Degas/Cassatt* at the National Gallery of Art (2014).\(^{38}\) Nimmo Moran, in contrast, is little known and little appreciated: her etchings – examples of which are held by nearly every major American museum – have been relegated to dusty storage boxes and are often sold on eBay for only a few hundred dollars.\(^{39}\) Her prints have received scant scholarly consideration and public exhibitions of her work have been few and far between.

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\(^{36}\) R.R., “Miss Mary Cassatt,” *The Art Amateur* 38 (May 6, 1898): 130 quoted in Mathews and Shapiro, 53.

\(^{37}\) The bibliography on Mary Cassatt is far too extensive to review here; however, relevant publications related to my research, notably on Cassatt’s prints, include Mathews and Shapiro; Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Mary Cassatt: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Marc Rosen, et al., *Mary Cassatt: Prints and Drawings from the Collection of Ambroise Vollard* (New York: Adelson Galleries, 2008); Madeleine Claire Viljoen, *Daring Methods: The Prints of Mary Cassatt* (New York: New York Public Library, 2013); and Jones and Zehnder, eds., *Degas/Cassatt*.

\(^{38}\) Viljoen and Jones and Zehnder.

\(^{39}\) For a list of public collections holding examples of Mary Nimmo Moran’s work, see the Bibliography.
Yet prior to 1900, it was Nimmo Moran, and not Cassatt, who was celebrated as the preeminent female American etcher. Cassatt’s graphic work, which was popular with critics and collectors in Europe, received mixed reviews when first exhibited in the United States: in 1887, collector Samuel Putnam Avery lent twenty-four of Cassatt’s etchings to the *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America*, where they were described in the catalogue simply as “twenty-four unfinished studies.” Peet argues that Cassatt’s involvement with the “modern movement had set her work apart from other American printmakers.” As a result, her etchings “went unrecognized by most of the American collectors of Etching Revival prints” and she quickly learned that in the United States “being progressive was not yet a criterion for professional acknowledgment or praise.” In 1892, after selling several prints in Paris, Cassatt wrote in frustration to dealer Joseph Durand-Ruel: “I am very glad you have any sale for them in Paris. Of course it is more flattering from an Art point of view than if they sold in America, but I am still very much disappointed that my compatriots have so little liking for any of my work.”

In contrast, this dissertation will illustrate that Nimmo Moran’s etchings appealed to the tastes of American audiences in the 1880s and 1890s, attracting widespread attention from critics and collectors. Her inventive approach to printmaking combined with her tonal landscape aesthetic met the market’s growing demand for original, expressive, and affordable works of art, while also providing visual respite for those seeking to escape the complexities of modern-industrial life. Yet it is the graphic art of Mary Cassatt and not Mary Nimmo Moran that has been heralded in the annals of American art. What accounts for this dramatic reversal?

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40 Cat. nos. 21-44 in *Exhibition Catalogue of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* (New York: Union League Club, 1888), 8. Cassatt’s prints were also included in the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, yet they arrived late and were not included in the catalogue. Peet, *American Women of the Etching Revival*, 9.
The Demise of an Artistic Reputation

In their 1990 study *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*, sociologists Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang analyze the social, historical, and biographical factors that affect an artist’s ability to transform lifetime recognition and renown into a lasting reputation.43 The Langs argue that a reputation is,

…above all, a social construction; it expresses a shared belief about the probity, generosity, ability, achievement, etc., of a known person…In the case of artists and other creators of culture, it inevitably rests in some way or manner on the products that they produce. But this linkage…can be indirect and is certainly influenced by existing opportunities and prevailing taste, both of which are eminently social and have little to do with characteristics intrinsic to the art objects themselves.44

As a result, the Langs investigate several factors, including gender, geography, nationality, age, class, and education that contribute to an artist either being remembered and celebrated or forgotten and ignored.

Their study is based on an examination of 286 British and American etchers who worked between 1880 and 1926. Mary Nimmo Moran is among the artists considered; yet I believe she is an outlier in the study, since she fulfills many of the Langs’ requirements for building a lasting reputation, yet remains an unknown figure in the history of American art. During her lifetime, Nimmo Moran achieved both recognition and renown, the former defined by the Langs as the “esteem in which ‘insiders’ hold the artist” and the latter by “how well the artist is known beyond the network of professional peers.” “Renown,” the Langs argue, “requires publicity, and its achievement turns more on what critics write about an artist, on dealer promotion, on sales, and on museum acquisitions than on the judgment of peers.”45 The widespread popularity of her etchings with contemporary artists, critics, curators, dealers, and collectors qualifies her as one

44 Ibid., xii.
who achieved both recognition and renown – the two factors that “lift an artist several rungs up the ladder to lasting stardom.”

Nevertheless, as the Langs demonstrate, this was not always sufficient to ensure lasting celebrity, since “the durability of reputation is linked to the artist’s leaving behind both a sizeable, accessible, identifiable oeuvre and persons with a stake in its preservation.” At the time of her death in 1899, Nimmo Moran left behind a substantial body of work, including etchings, oil paintings, watercolors, wood engravings, and pencil sketches. Although she died unexpectedly and did not have the opportunity to organize her estate, she was survived by husband Thomas Moran and daughter Ruth Bedford Moran, who worked together to preserve her legacy. Thomas Moran continued to print and exhibit her etchings, while Ruth Moran authored biographical essays, inventoried her works, organized her papers, and donated examples of her prints to noteworthy public collections, including the New York Public Library and the Smithsonian Institution. Despite these efforts, which according to the Langs are essential to establishing a posthumous reputation, audiences nevertheless lost interest in her work.

Moreover, as the wife of a renowned landscape painter and printmaker, Nimmo Moran should have benefitted from what the Langs describe as the “satellite effect”:

‘Major’ artists typically serve as symbolic markers for art historians, curators, and cataloguers. Some of the glow from the luminaries then falls on the lesser figures within their orbit. To be identified as someone’s student or someone’s follower can be an obstacle in building a reputation but in the long run converts into a plus…Proximity to some elite, whether through family or the artist’s own achievement, provides the cultural capital and connections that clear the road to lasting renown.

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46 Lang and Lang, 6.
47 Ibid., 331.
48 Although Nimmo Moran left behind a significant oeuvre, few documents authored by the artist survive. She is not known to have kept a diary or journal, although extant letters to Helena de Kay Gilder (Richard Watson Gilder Papers, 1855-1916, New York Public Library) and Henry Farrer (Private Collection, Baltimore) indicate that she corresponded with contemporary artists. This absence of written documentation likely contributed to the decline of her posthumous reputation.
49 Lang and Lang, 331 and 333.
My research reveals that Nimmo Moran’s experience deviates from this norm. During her lifetime, she greatly benefitted from her association with Thomas Moran: he trained her in the arts, encouraged her career, wrote professional correspondence on her behalf, and provided access to exhibitions, critics, dealers, and collectors. However, in the long run, being “Mrs. Thomas Moran” has been detrimental to her reputation, as his celebrity and success has heretofore overshadowed her achievements in the literature on American art.

Her career exhibits several of the Langs’ prerequisites for establishing a lasting reputation: lifetime recognition and renown; tangible, accessible art objects; survivors with a stake in posthumously promoting her work; and name recognition. Yet two important factors that are not thoroughly considered in the Langs’ study ultimately sealed her fate: medium and style. By returning to our comparison with Cassatt, we can assess the vital role that medium and style played in shaping Nimmo Moran’s posthumous reputation (or lack thereof). Both artists made important contributions to the development of original printmaking at the end of the nineteenth century, yet Cassatt’s primary success was as a painter. Nimmo Moran, in contrast, built her professional reputation as a printmaker. Although she painted landscapes before and after her pursuit of etching in 1879, her contributions were primarily to the graphic arts, which even today remain secondary to painting and sculpture in the hierarchy of media.

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Nimmo Moran’s decision to pursue printmaking rather than painting was the result of aesthetic preferences and practical considerations. Unlike Cassatt, who never married or had children of her own, Nimmo Moran

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50 In her review of Etched in Memory, sociologist Janet Wolff notes the Langs’ failure to fully address the importance of medium and style, writing: “Many of the successful etchers were also painters, and quite a few of those who achieved fame were also (sometimes already) famous as painters. It seems likely that visibility in the more high-profile arena of painting was an important factor here…Second, little is said about the style of the work…I would think that aesthetic debates and preferences (of artists, critics, and audiences) and the question of modernism must have been relevant to the issue of reputation.” Janet Wolff, “Review of Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation by Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang,” American Journal of Sociology 97, no. 2 (September 1991): 576.
was both a wife and mother. Her marriage to Thomas Moran undoubtedly advanced her professional career, yet domestic and familial duties also limited her output, notably as a painter. In the 1880s and 1890s, her dedication to etching was advantageous to her reputation, since the medium was widely popular with American audiences. However, following World War II, the market for original etchings greatly diminished and her success in this “minor” or “little” medium ultimately relegated her work to storage boxes and bargain bins.\textsuperscript{51}

Finally, I believe that style has played an integral role in the posthumous ascendance of Cassatt’s reputation and demise of Nimmo Moran’s. As noted, Cassatt worked primarily in Paris and was an integral figure in the Impressionist movement – a movement that has widespread popular appeal and one that has received tremendous scholarly attention as a result of its role in the development of modernism. Nimmo Moran, in contrast, remained in the United States and worked in a Tonalist style, which until relatively recently was overshadowed in the literature by American Impressionism.

**American Tonalism and the Tonalist Print**

Art historian David Adams Cleveland notes that prior to the 1970s Tonalism was typically “dismissed as a retardataire post-Barbizon style, a backward-looking effusion of the Gilded Age, or a leftover of the dowdy taste of our Victorian forebears.” Yet he illustrates that “this has distorted both the historical and artistic reality. In the decades surrounding 1900, Tonalism was the dominant style in American art.”\textsuperscript{52} Cleveland’s research builds on more than thirty years of Tonalist scholarship, which despite its advances has not yet addressed the important role of American printmaking to the style’s development in the 1880s and 1890s.

\textsuperscript{51} The Langs illustrate that interest in original etching continued, “through the 1920s but then, with the economic crash, came to a grinding halt. Public enthusiasm for etching waned. By the early 1930s the etching market had completely collapsed; World War II put an end to what was left of it.” Lang and Lang, xi.

In her groundbreaking study *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880-1910*, art historian Wanda Corn defined Tonalism not as a unified, conscious movement, but instead as “a style of intimacy and expressiveness, interpreting very specific themes in limited color scales and employing delicate effects of light to create vague, suggestive moods.” Unlike their Hudson River School predecessors, Tonalists were not interested in nature’s awe-inspiring grandeur. Instead, they depicted intimate, quiet corners of the American landscape in order to convey their personal impressions of nature.

She identified artists George Inness (American, 1825-1894) and James McNeill Whistler as the two major practitioners of American Tonalism. Although Inness began his career painting landscapes in the tight, analytic style of the Hudson River School, in the last decade of his life he developed what Corn describes as a “perfect tonal style – a reduced palette of soft colors coupled with a density of natural light.” Whistler, she argues, provided American artists with “another kind of model for creating intimate, evocative landscapes veiled in monochromatic mists.” He similarly painted in a limited color palette, combining what Americans believed to be “the best of Impressionism – the study of light – with the best of motivation, that of seeking to translate the moods and spirit of nature through expressive simplifications of composition and tone.”

Corn also recognized the important connection between Tonalist painting and Pictorial

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photography. She argued that between 1890 and 1910, American photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864-1946), Edward Steichen (American, 1879-973), Gertrude Käsebier (American, 1852-1934), and Alvin Langdon Coburn (American, 1882-1966) adopted “the same soft, atmospheric light, moods of quiet intimacy, and sense of mystery and suggestiveness found in [tonal] paintings.” She sees Tonalism as an “‘interdisciplinary’ style” and by examining paintings and photographs side by side aimed to “demonstrate the explicit ways the style and subject matter of Tonalism crossed media.”

Art historian Diane Fischer has further explored the “uncanny” resemblance of paintings and photographs during this period. In addition to the formal similarities highlighted by Corn – soft focus, emotive light, and muted tones – Fischer outlined their shared thematic concerns: “many of the photographers’ subjects are local. Even when the images are out of focus, a distinctive essence of America and its people is frequently conveyed…like the Tonalist painters, the Pictorialists responded to the increasingly frenzied pace of metropolitan life by creating escapist fantasies.” She argues that Pictorialists took “their cue from the paintings of Inness and his contemporaries…[and] invoked the sanctity of the American countryside.”

There have been a few attempts to examine Tonalism’s manifestation in other media, most recently in ceramics and poetry. However, the role of American printmaking – and notably the role of the American painter-etcher movement of the 1880s – has been almost

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58 Fischer, “Pictorialism as Tonalism,” 33-34.  
entirely overlooked. Cleveland’s *A History of American Tonalism* is a recent exception in the literature. In his fifth chapter titled “The Democratization of the Tonalist Landscape,” he writes:

The growing enthusiasm for watercolor, pastel, and etching mediums cannot be underestimated in the development and proliferation of the Tonalist landscape in the decades before 1900: the size, style, and technical innovations of the smaller mediums affected the approach to works in oil…the proliferation of watercolors, pastels, and etchings after 1880 was a key factor both in the stylistic development of Tonalism and the availability of fine art for the growing middle class.60

Although he rightfully credits “little media” with helping to popularize Tonalist imagery, his discussion of American etching is problematic, for he fails to consider the influence of printmakers who depicted the American landscape and worked in the United States in the 1880s. Cleveland argues that the Tonalist print was “born in the cold winter of Venice 1880-81 [sic] as Whistler produced his first and second Venice sets…His painterly effects, liquid use of plate tone, and offbeat views of Venice – produced hand in hand with his greatest pastels – precipitated a print revival in America and Europe.”61 As outlined in Chapter Three of this dissertation, etching’s revival – or, as it will be argued, redefinition – in France, England, and the United States was well underway when Whistler executed his first Venetian etchings. Although his influence on late-nineteenth-century printmaking was profound, when Whistler’s first Venice set was exhibited in the United States in 1881, American painter-etchers – and notably Mary Nimmo Moran – were already producing powerful Tonalist prints of the American landscape.62

In his nearly six-hundred-page study, Cleveland dedicates seven pages to the Tonalist print, focusing exclusively on the works that American etchers, such as Frank Duveneck

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60 Cleveland, 225.
(American, 1848-1919), Otto Bacher (American, 1873-1938), and Joseph Pennell (American, 1857-1926), executed in Venice under the “spell” of Whistler. He argues that because “the lure of Venice, or Whistler’s interpretation of it, resonated so deeply…it is little wonder it took American etchers some time to discover similar inspiration on their home shores, much less summon equal measures of finesse and enthusiasm.” He notes that, “although etching clubs abounded and then faded in the 1880s and 1890s, few landscapes of significant or lasting value were produced in America.”

Contrary to Cleveland’s analysis, an examination of Mary Nimmo Moran’s oeuvre reveals that American painter-etchers working in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century executed Tonalist prints of “significant or lasting value.” If we are to achieve what Corn describes as a “more holistic account of Tonalism” that looks beyond painting, it is necessary to examine the contributions not only of photographers, ceramicists, and poets, but also of printmakers – artists such as Nimmo Moran who depicted the American landscape and strategically employed tools and techniques to create harmonious tones in monochrome.

Moreover, in 2008, Corn noted that in The Color of Mood she “took no notice of the fact that while women were often the subject of Tonalist work, they were rarely the producers of it. While a good number of women practiced variations of Impressionism during this period, I have seen none, with the exception of a few photographers, who were dedicated Tonalists.” Nimmo Moran’s oeuvre offers a significant opportunity to examine American Tonalism across media and across genders: as a printmaker, her tonal landscapes reveal the ways in which American painter-etchers engaged with the same formal, thematic, and technical concerns as their contemporaries working in oil, watercolor, and later photography; as a woman, her prints reveal

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63 Emphasis added by the author. Cleveland, 259.
64 Corn, “Reflections on ‘The Color of Mood,’” 224.
that female artists were in fact the producers (and not simply the subjects) of Tonalist work.

**Organization of Dissertation**

Chapter One, “Becoming an Artist, 1842-1870,” outlines Mary Nimmo Moran’s early life and artistic education, contextualizing her pursuit of a career amidst the changing social, economic, and educational opportunities that enabled American women to practice art professionally. Chapter Two, “Art and Life in the 1870s,” examines her artistic endeavors prior to her pursuit of etching in 1879, including her travels to California and Florida, *plein-air* study along the eastern seaboard, illustrative work for popular periodicals, and publicly exhibited oil paintings. Her relatively limited output in the 1870s is considered amidst her increasingly demanding domestic duties, as she struggled to balance her seemingly contradictory roles as wife, mother, and professional artist.

Chapter Three, “Original Printmaking and the Rise of the Etching ‘Revival’ in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France, England, and the United States” provides an overview of the etching process, including its technical requirements, historical origins, and rising prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century. This chapter supplies the historical framework necessary for assessing Nimmo Moran’s aesthetic development and critical success. Chapter Four, “Etching New Paths,” explores the impetus behind the artist’s pursuit of etching, as well as her earliest experiments with the medium in 1879. The bold, painterly, original prints she executed that summer earned her election to the New York Etching Club and London’s Society of Painter-Etchers, setting the stage for her emergence as a leading figure in the field.

Chapter Five, “Looking at Long Island: The Etchings of the 1880s,” examines the landscape etchings Nimmo Moran executed in East Hampton between 1879 and 1889. During this decade she produced her most expressive, inventive, and popular prints, adopting various
tools, techniques, and processes to explore the tonal possibilities of the medium. I contend that her etched landscapes nostalgically preserve East Hampton’s rural past, as the town transitioned from an agrarian community into a modern resort. An analysis of her etchings reveals that she shared many of the same stylistic and thematic concerns as Tonalist painters of the 1880s, while her technical manipulations laid the groundwork for the material interventions of Pictorial photographers in the 1890s.

Chapter Six, “Reception, Exhibition, and Publication History,” reconstructs Nimmo Moran’s extensive reception, exhibition, and publication history in order to evaluate the widespread popularity of her work with American critics, curators, publishers, and collectors. I argue that her landscape etchings appealed to an urban clientele, who sought original, expressive, and affordable works of art that offered visual and psychic retreats from life in the modern metropolis. This chapter concludes with an examination of etching’s demise in the United States in the early 1890s and Nimmo Moran’s eventual return to oil painting.

This dissertation is the first comprehensive study dedicated to the life and work of Mary Nimmo Moran. Through an investigation of previously unpublished works and archival materials, I examine her ambitions and struggles, accomplishments and challenges, outlining her achievements as an innovative painter-etcher and influential interpreter of the American landscape. By contextualizing these achievements amidst noteworthy currents in American art, notably the rise of the etching revival and the evolution of American Tonalism, I reveal her contributions to the development of American printmaking and the history of American landscape art at the end of the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER 1: BECOMING AN ARTIST, 1842-1870

Early Life in Strathaven, Scotland

In May 1882, Mary Nimmo Moran, husband Thomas Moran, and their three children Paul Nimmo (American, 1864-1907), Mary Scott (American, 1867-1955), and Ruth Bedford (American, 1870-1948) traveled from New York to Glasgow aboard the SS Ethiopia.¹ The Morans spent the summer 1882 in Great Britain, traveling through Scotland, England, and Wales to sketch and etch from nature. For the trip, Nimmo Moran packed a selection of her recent etchings and an oil painting titled Newark from the Meadows (1879, figure 2.48). Her works were exhibited alongside several of Moran’s paintings, etchings, and illustrations at the Bromley Art Gallery in his hometown of Bolton, England. Yet prior to arriving in Bolton, the family traveled to Strathaven, Scotland, the birthplace of Mary Nimmo.

Born on May 16, 1842, Mary Nimmo was the first daughter and second child of Archibald Nimmo (Scottish, 1819-1878) and Mary Scott (Scottish, 1816-1847).² The couple married in Scotland’s Parish of Avondale in 1835 and had their first son Archibald Nimmo Jr. on January 20, 1838.³ At the time of Mary Nimmo’s birth, the family was living in Strathaven, a small market town located in South Lanarkshire, approximately twenty-five miles southeast of

² A transcription of “Scotland, Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950” indicates that she was born “16 Mar 1842.” However, this is likely a transcription error, as the date of birth inscribed on the Moran family monument in the South End Cemetery, East Hampton, Long Island, is May 16, 1842. Mary Nimmo, 16 Mar 1842, citing Avondale, Lanark, Scotland, reference - 2:16 HZNZF, FHL microfilm 1,041,474, in “Scotland, Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950,” database, FamilySearch, accessed December 12, 2012, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XTKY-9YZ.
Glasgow. Her father worked as a silk handloom weaver, a cottage industry introduced in Strathaven in 1788. By 1810, handloom weaving was the town’s primary trade and it soon developed into the largest manufacturing industry in all of Scotland, employing 80,000 individuals in 1840. Yet over the course of the next decade, economic decline coupled with the increased mechanization of the textile industry left many handloom weavers obsolete and unemployed. By 1850, the number of Scottish handloom weavers drastically dropped to 25,000, as earning a living wage in the trade became ever more challenging.

In the small textile producing town of Strathaven, handloom weavers such as Archibald Nimmo struggled to compete with the highly industrialized factories of nearby Glasgow. Many were forced to take jobs in cotton and jute factories, while others were drawn into the more dangerous industries of coal and steel. As economic opportunities declined, so too did health and environmental conditions: Scotland experienced cholera outbreaks in 1832 and 1848, and widespread fever outbreaks in 1818, 1826, 1837, 1843, and 1847. Mary Nimmo’s mother, Mary Scott Nimmo, likely lost her life to one such epidemic, dying in 1847 at the age of thirty-one when Mary Nimmo was just five years old.

According to Scotland’s 1851 census, Archibald Nimmo was living on “Mcgown’s Land” in Strathaven with his thirteen-year-old son Archibald Nimmo Jr. and nine-year-old daughter Mary Nimmo. As the future of handloom weaving diminished, Strathaven offered few opportunities for financial gain. Rather than pursue another line of work in Scotland, Archibald

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7 McCaffrey, 33.
Nimmo decided to seek out a new life in the new world. In 1852, the Nimmo family immigrated to the United States, settling in northeastern Philadelphia. They were among the estimated 154,000 emigrants who left Scotland in the 1850s, an indication of the country’s growing economic difficulties.

Archibald Nimmo’s aunt, Marion Nimmo, had immigrated to the United States with her husband, William Semple, around 1825. By 1850, the Semples were living in Plainfield Township in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, and they may have encouraged Archibald Nimmo to settle with his family in nearby Philadelphia. In the mid-nineteenth century, Philadelphia was the textile center of the United States with mills lining the Schuylkill River, providing thousands of immigrants with low-paying jobs. Archibald Nimmo went to work in one such textile mill and his son subsequently followed in his footsteps. Mary Nimmo, however, embarked upon a remarkably different path, one that would eventually bring her back to Scotland thirty years later. Having left Strathaven at the age of ten, she likely never imagined returning to the town as an accomplished professional artist.

During her homecoming in 1882, she memorialized the landscape of her youth in an etching titled *Cochrane’s O’ the Craig, Strathaven, Scotland* (1882, figure 1.1). Unlike Thomas

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9 Wilkins records the Nimmo family’s immigration date as 1847; however, Scotland’s 1851 census confirms that the family was still living in Strathaven in 1851, arriving in the United States at a later date. The precise year of their immigration remains unconfirmed, as I have not yet been able to locate immigration or ship records documenting their arrival. However, in 1900, United States census enumerators were required to record immigration dates. Archibald Nimmo Jr., who was then living in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, listed 1852 as the year of his immigration. Although the accuracy of this date has not yet been corroborated, the Nimmo family arrived in the United States sometime between Scotland’s 1851 census and 1858, the year that Mary Nimmo met her soon-to-be husband Thomas Moran in Philadelphia. Wilkins, 47 and Archibald Nimmo, Fort Monroe (Southern Branch National Home for D.U.S.), Elizabeth City, Virginia, United States, citing sheet 5A, NARA microfilm publication T623 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), in “United States Census, 1900,” database, FamilySearch, accessed June 20, 2015, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MMFY-CY6.

10 McCaffrey, 6-7.

Moran, who sketched and etched the town’s prominent medieval castle, Nimmo Moran focused on an unassuming view of the Avon Valley. A small stone cottage overlooks the River Avon with four cows wading in the shallow water – a picturesque subject perhaps of personal significance or inspired by a childhood memory. The densely etched sky adds atmospheric drama to the scene, yet when compared to Moran’s Bridge in the Pass of Glencoe, Scotland (1882, figure 1.2) her work appears calm and peaceful. While Moran typically preferred scenes of sublime drama, emphasizing the struggle of man versus nature, Nimmo Moran focused on quiet corners and intimate moments that evoke poetic moods of longing and nostalgia – a nostalgia for her own past, as well as that of her adopted nation.

The Moran Family in Bolton, England

Approximately two hundred miles south of Strathaven, Scotland, sits Bolton, England, the birthplace of Mary Nimmo’s future husband, Thomas Moran. Born on January 12, 1837, he was the fifth of seven children born in Bolton to Thomas Moran Sr. (Irish, 1801-1862) and Mary Higson Moran (English, 1807-1883). His father, a trained handloom weaver, was among the estimated one million Irish immigrants who had settled in England by 1844, when Friedrich Engels wrote his seminal study The Condition of the Working Class in England. Engels attributed much of England’s industrial expansion to the vast and highly impoverished Irish workforce who “had nothing to lose at home, and much to gain in England.” Many Irish immigrants settled in industrial towns and districts, which were, as Engels described them,

“badly and irregularly built with foul courts, lanes, and back alleys, reeking of coal smoke, and especially dingy from the originally bright red brick, turned black, with time.”

Engels described Bolton as among “the worst of these towns...[it] is even in the finest weather a dark, unattractive hole.” Bolton’s beginnings as a textile center date to the early thirteenth century; however, the industry underwent major transformations, first in the seventeenth century with the introduction of cotton and again in the eighteenth century with the development of John Kay’s flying shuttle (c. 1750), James Hargreaves’s spinning jenny (c. 1764), Richard Arkwright’s water frame (1760), Edward Cartwright’s power loom (1785-86), and Samuel Crompton’s spinning mule (1790). These technological advancements revolutionized the spinning and weaving sides of the textile industry, transforming Bolton into a town of mills and factories that by the 1840s suffered from the worst effects of early industrialization, including poverty, unemployment, and violent social unrest.

The bleak future of handloom weaving combined with Bolton’s privation served as the immediate impetus behind Thomas Moran Sr.’s immigration to the United States in 1842. Within two years, he sent for his family to join him and on April 15, 1844, Mary Higson Moran

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15 Engels, 47.
16 Ibid.
18 Art historian Nancy K. Anderson notes that Thomas Moran Sr.’s decision may have also been influenced by an interesting encounter with American culture. According to Mary Higson Moran, her husband “decided to try his luck in America” after attending a lecture in London given by American artist George Catlin. Catlin, who arrived in England in 1840, installed his “Indian Gallery” in London’s Egyptian Hall in an effort to sell his collection of paintings and artifacts. During his time abroad, he often lectured on American Indian life, although the precise lecture attended by Thomas Moran Sr. remains unknown. In 1843, Mary Higson Moran visited Catlin’s traveling exhibition and Indian troop in Manchester with sons Edward and Thomas Moran, who were fourteen and six years old, respectively. Thomas Moran later asserted that his mother was “artistic in her tastes” and he credited her with the family’s sustained interest in the arts. See Nancy K. Anderson, *Thomas Moran* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 22-23, 182, & 369, n. 5, and “Manuscript Material, Miscellaneous Notes by Ruth B. Moran,” Reel 1, Frame 71, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, New York.
and her seven children – Edward, John, James, Sarah, Thomas, Elizabeth, and Peter – boarded the *Thomas P. Cope* in Liverpool, arriving in Philadelphia on May 31, 1844.\(^1\)

The Morans’ arrival in Philadelphia was the first step toward their emergence as one of America’s most influential artist families.\(^2\) Unlike Bolton, Philadelphia offered opportunities for education, artistic training, exhibition, and publication. Yet the Morans were not the first Bolton natives to achieve artistic renown in the United States: this path was laid by Thomas Cole (American, 1801-1848), who was born into a family of handloom weavers in Bolton in 1801. Cole lived in England until 1818, when his family immigrated to the United States. Like the Morans, he witnessed firsthand the dramatic social and environmental impact of industrialization, which art historian Tim Barringer argues, “provided the young Cole with the starkest possible contrasts between country and city, rich and poor, employer and operative, old and new.”\(^3\) The negative implications of man’s encroachment upon nature became a leitmotif in Cole’s oeuvre, powerfully visualized in works such as *The Course of Empire* (1833-1836, The New-York Historical Society) and *The Oxbow* (1836, Metropolitan Museum of Art).\(^4\)

In 1841, Cole made his final trip to England, visiting the western part of Bolton to see the landscape of his youth. Although the Moran family was living in Bolton at the time, they were not yet familiar with the artist. Writing in 1894, Thomas Moran’s older brother, artist Edward Moran (American, 1829-1901), recalled that “across the way, if I had only known it, there lived a man of much more considerable powers, a hand-loom weaver, and came of a family of weavers, like our own – the late Thomas Cole…[he] was probably impelled to come to America by the

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\(^1\) Wilkins, 12.


\(^4\) For a detailed discussion of Cole’s *The Course of Empire* in the context of his youth in Bolton, see Ibid., 30-44.
same reasons that moved my people to take the same step – that is, the failure of work consequent on the invention of steam machinery.”

Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran, and Mary Nimmo were children of the industrial revolution. Born into handloom weaving families, they immigrated to the United States while still in their youth. Given opportunities for education and training, they emerged as professional artists, whose painted and etched landscapes celebrate the scenery of their adopted nation. Early exposure to the dislocating effects of industrialization strengthened each artist’s dedication to nature, for as English critic Philip Gilbert Hamerton later wrote, “The city, then, where the landscape-painter is born, ought not to be very beautiful; it ought rather to be decidedly unsatisfying to the artistic sense…so that the young genius should not escape from it too easily into the country, but be tormented with the aching of the heart which is the nostalgia of the lovers of Nature.”

Pursuing Art Professionally in Philadelphia

In 1845, the Morans settled in Kensington – a working-class suburb of Philadelphia known as “Little England.” As was common among immigrant families, Thomas Moran Sr. continued working as a weaver while his children were educated in the public school system. Edward Moran was the first in the family to pursue a professional career in the arts: while working as a “power-loom boss” in a textile factory, he was introduced to marine painter James Hamilton (American, 1819-1878), who encouraged the aspiring young artist to establish a studio. Edward initially supported himself through lithographic work, but soon began exhibiting paintings, making his professional debut at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

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25 Anderson, 23.
Arts in 1854. His early success set an important example for his younger brothers Thomas and Peter Moran, who followed in his footsteps as professional painters.\textsuperscript{27}

After graduating from William Henry Harrison Boy’s Grammar School in 1853, Thomas Moran entered in an apprenticeship at the Philadelphia engraving firm of Scattergood and Telfer. While New York was the nation’s art capital, Philadelphia remained the center of the publishing industry and wood engravers were in high demand. Thomas Moran’s abilities as a draughtsman far outweighed his engraving skills and the firm put him to work drawing designs on wood blocks for others to engrave.\textsuperscript{28} His apprenticeship was scheduled to last seven years; yet in 1855 and for reasons unknown, he abruptly left Scattergood and Telfer and moved into the studio of brother Edward Moran, where despite his modest means he began his self-education in the arts.\textsuperscript{29}

Over the next few years, Thomas and Edward Moran shared a studio, moving around Philadelphia with some frequency.\textsuperscript{30} Their artistic interests and influences were thoroughly intertwined during this period: neither artist received formal instruction, instead pursuing their own course of study, seeking advice from local artists, including James Hamilton and Paul Weber (American, 1823-1916), visiting exhibitions, and copying reproductive prints in illustrated books.\textsuperscript{31} The Romantic landscapes of J.M.W. Turner (English, 1775-1851) were especially influential, although their initial familiarity with his work was through printed

\textsuperscript{27} On the life and work of Peter Moran, see David G. Wright, \textit{Domestic and Wild: Peter Moran’s Images of America} (Baltimore: Creo Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{28} Wilkins, 19.
\textsuperscript{29} Several reasons for the premature termination of Thomas Moran’s apprenticeship have been proposed. Wilkins believes that in 1856 Moran contracted rheumatic fever and after recovering refused to return to the engraving firm. Anderson suggests that Moran’s departure may have been provoked by a disagreement between the artist and the firm over the sale of his drawings and watercolors. Wilkins, 20 and Anderson, 369, n. 10.
\textsuperscript{30} In 1855, Thomas and Edward Moran shared a studio at 308 Callowhill Street. In 1856, they moved first to 186 Locust Street and later to 37 Castle Street. In 1857, they moved to 1039 Castle Street, eventually settling into a studio at 915 Sergeant Street in 1858. This served as Edward Moran’s studio for nearly a decade, however Thomas Moran relocated after his brother’s marriage to Elizabeth McManes in 1859. In 1860, Thomas Moran was sharing a studio at 726 Samson Street with artists Samuel Sartain and Stephen J. Ferris. Orrin Rogers and Archibald McElroy, \textit{McElroy’s Philadelphia City Directory} (Philadelphia: A. McElroy & Co, 1856-1860).
\textsuperscript{31} Thomas Moran later described Hamilton as his “teacher,” although he denied receiving any formal instruction from the artist. Anderson, 24.
reproductions of his paintings. These were available at the Philadelphia engraving shop of John Sartain (American, 1808-1897) and Moran often exchanged his own watercolors for illustrated books, including a copy of Turner’s *Rivers of France*.32

In addition to visual resources, Thomas Moran was a vociferous reader. He was heavily influenced by the writings of English critic John Ruskin, which were frequently published in the American periodical *The Crayon*.33 Moran also read Ruksin’s *Modern Painters* and *The Elements of Drawing* – the latter an instructional manual devised for the “isolated student.”34 In this text, Ruskin promoted drawing directly from nature: he instructed students to begin by studying a single leaf, expanding their visual repertoire gradually over time. Moran heeded Ruskin’s truth to nature advice and in the 1850s and 1860s made several *plein-air* sketching trips along the banks of the Schuylkill River.35 He remained devoted to *plein-air* study throughout his career and it was the single most important lesson he would later share with his most assiduous student, Mary Nimmo Moran.

In 1858, the Moran family moved from Kensington to a new home at 828 Centre Street in Crescentville, a neighborhood in northeastern Philadelphia.36 At the time, Edward and Thomas Moran were sharing a studio at 915 Sergeant Street, yet they made frequent trips to Crescentville to visit their family. It was there that Thomas Moran first met Mary Nimmo, whose family’s home is said to have neighbored that of the Morans.37 Biographer Thurman Wilkins described

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36 Wilkins, 47.
37 It is often repeated in the literature that the Nimmo and Moran families were neighbors in Crescentville, yet I have not been able to definitively confirm this assertion, as there is no record of the Nimmo family’s address in *McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory* between 1852 and 1870.
Mary Nimmo as “small and attractive,” noting that she “captivated Moran at once.”[38] In an unpublished autobiographical note, she indicated that she was sixteen years old when she first met Thomas Moran, whom she described as the “well known landscape painter.”[39]

Moran was in fact just beginning his artistic career in 1858, although he had already achieved considerable recognition. In 1856, he made his professional debut at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, contributing six watercolors to the annual exhibition. Over the next five years, he exhibited oil and watercolor paintings at the Academy with frequency, earning his election as Academician in 1861.[40] During the couple’s courtship, which lasted approximately four years, Moran worked fervently to establish himself as a noteworthy new figure in Philadelphia’s art scene. He also traveled extensively during this period, making his first western excursion to Lake Superior in 1860.[41] Two years later, he and Edward Moran returned to England, where they spent several weeks copying Turner’s work at the National Gallery in London. Although Moran had previously studied prints executed after Turner’s paintings, experiencing the artist’s powerful use of color firsthand had a lasting impact on his artistic development.

While abroad, the Moran brothers embarked on a month-long tour of England’s southern coast, retracing the trail taken by Turner nearly half a century prior. Recounting the trip in an 1888 article in *The Art Amateur*, Edward Moran explained that after comparing Turner’s engravings to nature, they found the artist to be “very inaccurate – willfully so…but his changes

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were always possible changes; his knowledge of the forms of land and sea and cloud was so thorough that he could do pretty much as he pleased with them, and yet keep within the bounds of naturalness.”

This was an enlightening experience for Thomas Moran and it shaped his understanding of the artist’s role as interpreter, rather than transcriber, of nature.

Moran later described Turner as “a great artist,” but felt that he was “not understood, because both painters and the public look upon his pictures as transcriptions of Nature…Literally speaking, his landscapes are false; but they contain his impressions of Nature…The literal truth counts for nothing; it is within the grasp of any one who has had an ordinary art-education. The mere restatement of an external scene is never a work of Art, is never a picture.”

Throughout his career, Moran showed little interest in topographical accuracy and often invoked Turner’s example when criticized for his own pictorial manipulations. His subjective approach to nature would later influence the landscape aesthetic adopted by Mary Nimmo Moran, yet when he returned from England in the fall 1862, these ideas were only beginning to develop in the mind and work of the young artist.

After their extended courtship, Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo were married in Philadelphia’s Church of the Assumption, Blessed Virgin Mary on February 9, 1863. For the majority of female artists working in the nineteenth century, marriage – followed by motherhood – made a professional career difficult, if not impossible, to pursue. Women often abandoned their careers after marriage or, conversely, chose to remain single since domestic duties would significantly interfere with their professional aspirations. In this regard, Mary Nimmo Moran’s

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experience was somewhat unique, since her marriage to Thomas Moran opened, rather than closed, the doors to a career in the arts. She later acknowledged that, “from him [Thomas Moran] came all my first impressions of art and nature as applied to art, up to that time I had never thought of using the brush or pencil.”

In nearly every account previously published on the life of Mary Nimmo Moran, the same biographical anecdote is repeated, namely that her interest in art and training as an artist began after her marriage to Thomas Moran. In 1881, critic Sylvester Rosa Koehler noted that prior to meeting Moran, “she had shown no special predilection toward art. Thrown in constant contact with it, she soon developed an intense love for it.” In 1888, A. de Montaigu of *The Art Stationer* wrote that, “Dating from the period of her marriage, Mrs. Moran became a devotee of art, studying with great assiduity, both in oil and water color under the guidance of her husband,” while critic Frances Benson later remarked that she had “never touched a brush to canvas until she married Thomas…under his guidance she took up drawing, water-color and oil.”

This narrative continued into the twentieth century: in 1901, Morris T. Everett published the first posthumous summary of the artist’s career, reiterating that after the couple married, Nimmo Moran “immediately became his pupil, and worked under his direction with greatest assiduity both in water-colors and oils.” More than eighty years later, printmaker Nancy Friese concluded that “it does not seem surprising that Mary Nimmo Moran’s constant association with her husband’s burgeoning art career aroused her love for art and that it was he who became her

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45 Nimmo Moran, “Incomplete Autobiographical Sketch.”
teacher.” This account is reinforced by the oft-cited quote from the artist, who stated that from the time of her marriage “I may say I have always been my husband’s pupil.”

While it is without question that Thomas Moran introduced his wife to art and was her earliest teacher, there are two important components of this narrative that require further examination. Firstly, scholars have yet to analyze the circumstances – personal, social, and historical – that motivated her pursuit of a professional career. Secondly, there has been no attempt to reconstruct the training she received from her husband: how did he teach her to draw and paint? What tools did he use? And what impact did these early educational experiences have upon her development as an artist? In other words, what did Mary Nimmo Moran, the pupil and the blank slate who “never touched a brush to canvas” learn from her master?

In 1893, Benson set forth the only rationale heretofore proposed to explain her pursuit of an artistic career: she writes that after her marriage, Nimmo Moran “found if they were to be congenial she must understand her husband’s pursuits.” Wilkins later reinforced this perception, arguing that she studied drawing and painting “with the thought of making herself a better companion.” The notion that she pursued art making in order to be a suitable and pleasing wife fails to examine the economic considerations that prompted her training, as well as the social and historical circumstances that made her pursuit of a professional career possible.

Both Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran were born into working-class families who immigrated to the United States in search of a better life and financial future. Although Moran would later achieve significant commercial success – selling his *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* to the United States Congress for $10,000 in 1872 – at the time of his marriage, he

50 Nimmo Moran, “Incomplete Autobiographical Sketch.”
51 Benson, 78.
52 Wilkins, 51.
was still working to achieve financial stability.\textsuperscript{53} Through his art, he was responsible for supporting his new family, an obligation that became ever more pressing after Nimmo Moran gave birth to the couple’s first child and only son Paul Nimmo Moran on April 11, 1864. As a result, Moran began painting pictures that were, as he described them, “made to sell & not painted for love of subject.”\textsuperscript{54} He also pursued opportunities as a freelance illustrator and began teaching at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women to supplement his earnings as an artist.

His varied pursuits reflect the unpredictability of the art market during the Civil War, which had drastically reduced commercial commissions available to artists, producing, as \textit{The New York Evening Post} wrote, “the unprofitable state of art in these warlike days.”\textsuperscript{55} As early as 1861, the paper noted that, “the political troubles have affected the artists’ profession,” but nevertheless encouraged artists to “avail themselves of the present lull to give more time to the detail and finish of the works upon their easels, and they will find that they are not losers in the end from this temporary inactivity of the ‘picture market.’”\textsuperscript{56} The uncertainty of the art market combined with the responsibility of supporting his growing family may have motivated Moran to train his wife as an artist. Nimmo Moran’s working-class background likely made her amenable to the prospect of a professional career, as she undoubtedly understood the importance of contributing to the family’s income.

The economic factors that impelled Nimmo Moran to pick up the brush and pencil were common, as many American women pursued art out of financial necessity. Art historian April Masten has argued that between 1840 and 1880 financial necessity was the most powerful agent

\textsuperscript{53} Anderson, 204.
\textsuperscript{54} Moran delineated these works by including a drawing of a pot after his signature. As he explained in his “Opus List”: “All pictures with pot at end of name, indicate pictures made to sell & not painted for love of the subject.” See Moran, “Opus List,” reproduced in Anderson, 356.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The New York Evening Post} (June 19, 1861) quoted in Wilkins, 49.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{The New York Evening Post} (April 9, 1861) quoted in Ibid.
driving women to become artists. Industrialization, economic depression, and the outbreak of the Civil War forced many women to become self-sufficient and they studied art to pursue professional careers as painters, printmakers, illustrators, and designers. As Masten writes:

Mid-nineteenth century women artists came from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances, but most were children of the middling classes who took up the profession when forced to earn a living. They were the daughters and wives, orphans and widows of degraded artisans, struggling farmers, poor ministers, and distressed merchants who fell victim to the economic upheavals of the 1840s and 1850s, and to the Civil War. They grew up in both urban and rural areas of the country. They were native born and immigrants, occasionally black or American Indian, downward and upwardly mobile.

There is no indication that the Morans were ever in dire financial straits, nor is there evidence that Nimmo Moran pursued a career to be self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the uncertainty that pervaded the American economy during the Civil War – an uncertainty that drove thousands of young women to pursue professional opportunities – undoubtedly affected the Moran household.

While an artistic career offered opportunities for economic gain, Nimmo Moran’s professionalism also solidified her status as a member of the middle class. Art historian Kirsten Swinth has argued that professionalism was an essential component of middle-class identity and women often pursued professional careers as an expression of their middle-class ambitions. A career in the arts provided both economic improvement and upward social mobility, enabling Nimmo Moran to rise above her working-class beginnings and, later in life, to challenge the prescribed boundaries of her sex.

Given Thomas Moran’s dedication to his profession, the most viable career for Nimmo Moran to pursue was as an artist, especially since her training could be obtained from her husband, in the home, and at no cost. In addition to the sheer convenience with which she could

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58 Ibid., 69.
access an education, an artistic profession was one of the few “acceptable” careers available to American women in the second half of the nineteenth century. It offered opportunities for self-improvement and self-sustainment, while also maintaining societal standards of proper femininity. Yet the acceptance of professional women in the arts was hard fought, developing gradually over time, and had not always applied to earlier generations of aspiring female artists.

Prior to mid-century, the image of the professional artist was invariably an image of a middle-class man: he was self-made, business-oriented, and inhabited the public sphere; yet his identity depended upon his female “other,” a being who was pure, pious, submissive, and inhabited the private sphere. As domestic creatures, women were expected to maintain beautiful homes, providing their husbands and children with a safe haven from the ill effects of the Jacksonian marketplace. To create such spaces, women cultivated their skills in the domestic arts, including embroidery, needlepoint, and lace making, while many upper- and middle-class women learned the polite art of drawing. These artistic pursuits came to be viewed as extensions of women’s “natural abilities,” perfectly compatible with their domestic identities.

While a woman’s training in the accomplished arts was never intended to prepare her for a professional career, it nevertheless provided an important connection between femininity and art making. Art historian Laura Prieto has argued that women took advantage of this connection, using it as a point of entry into the professional art world: “Women gradually transmuted ladylike leisure activities into opportunities for serious study and finally some degree of professionalism by the latter half of the nineteenth century…the ability to connect an occupation to ideas about ‘woman’s nature’ proved crucial to overcoming obstacles erected against women’s

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60 Swinth notes that, “only in fields such as social work, in which female traits and the aims of the profession could be correlated, did women move as rapidly into the field.” Swinth, 18.

This association between art and womanhood was advantageous and women’s claim to culture ultimately facilitated their transition from amateurs to professionals, as they transformed genteel accomplishments into career opportunities.

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the majority of female artists who achieved professional recognition in the United States were related to successful male artists. It was through their fathers, uncles, or brothers that these women obtained training and made the professional connections necessary for exhibitions and commissions. However, for those women who were not related to established male artists, opportunities for art education remained limited. A woman could potentially enter into an apprenticeship with a professional male artist, although such instruction, even for male art students, was informal and infrequent. Furthermore, it was generally deemed inappropriate for a woman to work closely with a man who was not a member of her family, making an apprenticeship socially inconceivable for most women.

By the 1840s, social reformers began to address the scarcity of educational opportunities available to American women. In urban areas, there was a steady increase in the number of women who were either supporting themselves or contributing to their family’s income. Many were members of the middle-class and in order to maintain their status as “respectable” women, their employment options were limited to low-paid teaching and seamstress work. As the question of how women would support themselves became increasingly pressing, many reformers turned to the arts for answers.

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62 Prieto, 8.
In 1848, Sarah Worthington King Peter, an Ohio-born philanthropist and patron of the arts, opened the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (PSDW) – the nation’s first design school dedicated to providing women with vocational training in the arts. Since the commercial arts were believed to be within the sphere of acceptable femininity, the school’s curriculum did not threaten conventional definitions of womanhood. The PSDW’s success and popularity set an important precedent and women’s design schools were soon established in cities across the country, from New York and Boston to Pittsburgh and Cincinnati.

Furthermore, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design – the country’s two most prominent art academies – began to recognize and address the professional needs of women. In 1844, the Pennsylvania Academy’s Board of Directors passed a resolution granting women artists “exclusive use of the statue gallery for professional purposes” and two years later the National Academy of Design began regularly enrolling female students in its Antique School. Artist Asher B. Durand (American, 1796-1886), then president of the National Academy, supported this reform, noting that the “Female Department” would “doubtless eventuate in no small advantage to the cause of Art.” Between 1826 and 1860, at least 118 women (fourteen of whom were elected members) displayed works in the National Academy of Design’s annual exhibitions, leading The New York Times to report:

The number of ladies in America who have taken up the study of Art as a profession is very much greater than is generally supposed. The exhibitions of the Academy of Design have, year by year, shown not only an increase in numbers, but have also given evidence

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66 Ibid., 330.
67 Minutes of the Board of Directors, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, January 8, 1844 quoted in Huber, 12.
68 Although a few female students had been admitted to the National Academy of Design’s Antique School as early as 1831, regular admission began in 1846. Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, American Women Artists: From Early Indian Times to the Present (New York: Avon, 1982), 92.
69 Daniel P. Huntington, “President’s Annual Report,” May 13, 1846, Minute Books of the National Academy of Design quoted in Masten, 16. Masten notes that while Durand likely envisioned women influencing the profession through their husbands and sons, most female students who took the class intended to become professional artists.
of steady application and consequent growth of ability on the part of our women artists. Hitherto they have always been brought into direct competition with men, and the high place they have won, both in popular favor and critical appreciation, is itself sufficient proof of their powers.69

By the 1860s, art magazines, women’s magazines, and advice books encouraged American women to pursue art professionally, as it was one of the few careers in which a woman’s femininity, respectability, and middle-class identity could be protected.70 In February of 1861, The Crayon published an article titled “Woman’s Position in Art,” which aimed to “circulate some ideas bearing upon Art in relation to the gentle sex, to show what a vast field for employment there is open to women, consistent with their organic powers and social relationships. A French writer, M. Lagrange, is our authority.”71 The Crayon was referring to French critic Léon Lagrange, who had recently published an influential article in the Gazette des beaux-arts titled “Du Rang des femmes dans les arts.”72

Quoted at length in The Crayon, Lagrange’s article advocated for women’s pursuit of drawing and painting. He argued that these activities could be practiced in seclusion and were “more consonant with feminine instincts of modesty and privacy, and more worthy of public encouragement.”73 While a female actress, dancer, or musician was required to perform in the public sphere, putting her physical body on display, a female artist could preserve her purity and reputation, as “no-one would come to lift the veil which hides her face, no-one would demand that she display herself…she could be concealed, chaste and pure, in the corner of a solitary

70 Prieto, 25.
71 “Woman’s Position in Art,” The Crayon 8, no. 2 (February 1861): 25.
73 “Woman’s Position in Art,” 25.
living room.”\textsuperscript{74} Furthermore, as Lagrange noted, it was an artist’s work, not her body, that would be put on exhibition:

Exhibitions, open to everybody, will afford the public an opportunity to measure her talent or genius; critics will confine their attacks to her works, and praise, if she deserves it, will reach her eyes and ears in terms that she will be able to listen to or peruse without the accompaniment of a blush. The capital point which separates such a one from musicians and singers is this, that the female painter or engraver may follow her profession in the shadow of retirement, overlooked, never publicly advertised, and never summoned to appear before the curious and heartless world.\textsuperscript{75}

Although Lagrange supported women’s pursuit of art, he did not believe that their ambitions should (or could) rival those of their male contemporaries. He insisted that female painters “may not cover grand canvases,” but instead should limit themselves to painting porcelain, ivory, miniatures, and botanical illustrations. Women’s “nimble fingers” and patient dispositions also made them particularly suited to excel in the “lower” arts of embroidery, jewelry, wood sculpture, furniture, lithography, and engraving. The latter, he argued, should be entirely transferred from the hands of men to those of women, since its execution required a feminine temperament: “Man is not made for sedentary life; woman, on the contrary, conforms to it without inconvenience; she better maintains that close, unceasing attention, that motionless activity which the engraver’s pursuit demands…cutting on copper and steel demands also a patience and minutia much more compatible with the nature of woman than with that of man.”\textsuperscript{76}

While women were believed to have the natural inclinations necessary for producing decorative and industrial art objects, their ability to succeed depended upon their access to proper education and training. By learning to draw and paint, design and illustrate, women could contribute to the betterment of society and, to this end, Lagrange argued, “there would be every


\textsuperscript{75} “Woman’s Position in Art,” 26-27.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 28.
advantage both to art and to the sex to see women more generally practice the fine arts. This result might be obtained, if our civilized society would recognize and provide means of education similar to those provided for men.\(^{77}\)

Lagrange’s argument in favor of educating women in the fine arts resonated with American readers at a particularly transitional moment in the nation’s history. With the outbreak of the Civil War, women began to take on more prominent positions in society and an education in the arts offered an avenue to respectable employment. When Mary Nimmo Moran began her artistic training in 1863, she was among the first generation of female artists to benefit from the social and institutional developments that fundamentally transformed America’s art world making it possible for women to succeed. Over the next half-century, women artists continued to demand and receive far-reaching reforms, enabling them to pursue professional careers as painters, sculptors, printmakers, and designers in unprecedented numbers.

However, unlike many of her female contemporaries, who trained at an academy or in design school, Nimmo Moran studied with her husband in the home. While this had been standard practice for centuries, in the 1860s formal instruction superseded family apprenticeships. In this regard, her education was somewhat unique for the period, conforming to the practices of the past, rather than the developments of the present. She nevertheless benefitted from reforms to women’s art education, which greatly contributed to the growing acceptance of professional women artists in society.

While her training may have been motivated by financial imperatives, Moran’s consistent and lasting support of his wife’s professional career reveals his progressive stance on the advancement of women in the arts. His outlook may have been influenced by John Sartain, who publicly expressed his support for women’s art education in 1863:

\(^{77}\) “Woman’s Position in Art,” 28.
I have no females in my employment, because I work alone...But if I were willing to be troubled with the teaching of any one at all, I should choose a female. This is from my experience of the males I taught in the past. Women have the requisites more than men – patience, neatness, delicacy; and the occupation is suitable for them as any other they are accustomed to adopt. An unmarried daughter of mine is about to learn from me, with a view to follow it as a profession...I am chairman of the committee on instruction at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and in that capacity do all I can (as do also the other directors) to encourage female talent. We have seven or eight ladies among our students, and they certainly are fully equal to the males in capacity for acquiring art.\textsuperscript{78}

Sartain’s statement was published in Virginia Penny’s \textit{The Employments of Women}, which Moran may or may not have read; regardless, as an elected Academician at the Pennsylvania Academy, he was undoubtedly aware of Sartain’s favorable attitude toward women artists. Moreover, Sartain’s training of his “unmarried daughter,” Emily Sartain, may have inspired Moran to train his wife as an artist.

If Nimmo Moran had attended an academy or design school, her curriculum would have been relatively standardized, learning first and foremost how to draw. Art educators such as Sartain emphasized the primacy of drawing, noting that “for whatever branch of the fine arts is to be followed, the first requisite is \textit{drawing}, the next is \textit{drawing}, and the third and last is \textit{drawing}.”\textsuperscript{79} Her earliest lessons with Moran were certainly in the art of drawing, yet in addition to his guidance she likely studied from illustrated manuals, such as John Gadsby Chapman’s widely circulated \textit{The American Drawing Book}.\textsuperscript{80} Chapman’s manual guided students through a series of successive stages, beginning with simple lines and geometric shapes before moving on to more advanced objects and landscapes, culminating with the human form.

Manuals such as Chapman’s targeted both male and female students and aimed to train professionals, rather than leisured amateurs. There were also manuals written for aspiring landscape painters, such as Frances Palmer’s \textit{New York Drawing Book}, as well as texts written

\textsuperscript{78} John Sartain quoted in Virginia Penny, \textit{The Employments of Women} (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1863), 99-100.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 100.  
specifically for female artists, such as Maria Turner’s *The Young Ladies Assistant in Drawing and Painting*. Immensely popular and widespread, these publications provided students with practical instructions in drawing and painting, and often included descriptions of printmaking processes such as etching and mezzotint. Nimmo Moran could have easily referenced such works in order to sharpen her abilities and supplement her lessons with Moran.  

Learning to draw formed the foundation of her education and her ability as a draftswoman is particularly evident in her field sketches of the 1870s and etchings of the 1880s. After mastering her drafting skills, she advanced to painting in watercolor and oil. Early on, she likely copied examples of Moran’s paintings, which in the 1860s included painstakingly detailed forest interiors. She also had access to Moran’s library with copies of Ruskin’s writings, as well as Turner’s *Rivers of France* and *Liber Studiorum* – the latter composed of etchings, engravings, and mezzotints executed after Turner’s paintings. This work had a lasting impact on Moran, who was inspired by the sublimity of Turner’s landscapes, and Nimmo Moran, who pursued a tonal aesthetic reminiscent of the rich modulations seen in Turner’s prints.

Nimmo Moran’s early education came from an eclectic mix of resources: she studied from manuals, copied paintings and prints, and read texts on art and nature. She was also exposed to the works of Thomas Moran’s brothers, including the paintings of Edward and Peter Moran and the landscape photographs of John Moran, which were exhibited in Philadelphia throughout the 1860s. Moreover, in 1865, Thomas Moran began teaching landscape painting at

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83 See, for example, Thomas Moran, *Cresheim Glen, Wissahickon, Autumn* (1864, Hevrdejs Collection) and Thomas Moran, *Forest Scene* (1870, Private Collection), reproduced in Anderson, 38 and 44.
the PSDW.\textsuperscript{85} Although there is no record of Nimmo Moran’s official enrollment in the school, she may have informally attended her husband’s lectures or, at the very least, was exposed to his lessons at home.

Nimmo Moran pursued landscape painting from the outset – a seemingly obvious choice considering Moran’s overwhelming preference for the genre. Given her later history of traveling with her husband and his reliance on \textit{plein-air} study, it is probable that as his pupil she accompanied him on outdoor sketching trips in the woodlands surrounding Philadelphia. As noted, Moran shared with his wife the importance of studying directly from nature, which became a guiding principle of her work and one that she maintained throughout her career. Unfortunately, there are no known sketches or paintings that survive from this period of study and her earliest extant work dates to 1869 (figure 2.47).

\textbf{A European Sojourn, 1866-1867}

The most important and influential moment in Mary Nimmo Moran’s artistic education came in June 1866, when she, Thomas Moran, and their two-year old son Paul Nimmo traveled to Europe. They began their trip in London to study the work of Turner before making their way to Paris, where they rented a studio at 50 rue de l’Ouest for nine months.\textsuperscript{86} The museums, exhibitions, academies, and ateliers of Paris offered aspiring American artists incredible opportunities for cultural immersion. An extended period abroad was believed to be an essential component of any artist’s education and by the 1870s it was considered a prerequisite to professionalization.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} Anderson, 190.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{87} Swinth estimates that approximately one-third of the 2,200 American artists who were born before 1880 and studied formally in Paris were women. Swinth, 37-39. On American artists in Paris, see Kathleen Adler, et al., \textit{Americans in Paris, 1860-1900} (London: National Gallery, 2006).
While in Paris, the Morans connected with other American artists abroad, including Thomas Eakins (American, 1844-1916) and William Trost Richards (American, 1833-1905). Unlike many of their American contemporaries, the Morans did not pursue a formal course of study by training in academy or atelier. Instead, they followed their own personalized curriculum, much as they had done in Philadelphia. They spent extensive time in the Louvre, studying the paintings of Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorrain, and Nicolas Poussin, whose works they admired but knew only through printed reproductions. They were also drawn to the Louvre’s collection of seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes and Moran executed studies after paintings by Rembrandt and Herman Swanevelt.

The couple supplemented their studies in the Louvre with visits to the French countryside, making at least one sketching trip to the Forest of Fontainebleau. Located approximately thirty miles from Paris, the Forest inspired the generation of French landscape painters known in their lifetime as the École de 1830, but popularly known today as the Barbizon School. The Forest’s wooded and rocky terrain appealed to the Morans and was perhaps reminiscent of the natural environs of Philadelphia. Moran’s biographer Thurman Wilkins later wrote that “the more he and Mollie [Mary Nimmo Moran] studied the luxuriant stands of oak, beech, pine, and birch trees the more convinced they were of the justness of the forest’s fame.” Although Nimmo Moran’s sketches of the Forest are not known to survive, Moran executed at least five studies in Fontainebleau, drawing its famed oak trees and celebrated Gorges of Apremont.

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88 Wilkins, 55.
90 Morand notes that in the five surviving sketches Moran executed in the Forest of Fontainebleau, the trees are covered with foliage, indicating that they visited the Forest in either summer 1866 or spring 1867. Ibid., 31-32.
91 Wilkins, 56.
Back in Paris, the Morans visited the studio of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, or “Papa Corot” as he was known at the time for his role as a founding father of the Barbizon School. Thomas Moran later recounted this visit in an interview with The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, noting that when he visited Corot, the artist was working on “those gray pictures that you find in every American auction.”\(^2\) Despite having to converse through a translator, “as he understood no English and I no French,” Moran described Corot as “full of life – a bright, wide awake, cheerful old fellow.”\(^3\) Although he would later refer to the artists of the Barbizon School as “all men of one idea…[who paint] forever the forests of Fontainebleau,” at the time of this European sojourn the landscapes of Corot, Theodore Rousseau, and Charles-François Daubigny had an important affect on Moran’s developing aesthetic.\(^4\)

The trip to Fontainebleau and the visit to Corot’s studio had a more profound and lasting impact on the career of Mary Nimmo Moran. Her landscape paintings and etchings of the late 1870s and 1880s reveal the influence of the Barbizon School: studying directly from nature, she adopted a subjective and expressive approach to representing her local landscape, emphasizing the emotive power of light, weather, and atmosphere. Moreover, her interest in preserving America’s rural, agrarian past in the face of fast-paced industrialization echoes an underlying theme in Barbizon paintings and prints. Art historian Robert Herbert notes that Barbizon artists “avoided the most contemporary phenomena, the incredible expansion of cities,” finding solace and release in nature. The countryside, Herbert argues, “was not just different from the city, it was the past still surviving in the present.”\(^5\) When depicting the landscape of East Hampton – which came to be known as the “American Barbizon” – Nimmo Moran similarly seized upon the

\(^3\) Ibid.
therapeutic power of nature as an antidote to life in the urban metropolis.

While abroad, the Morans also visited Italy, spending February and March 1867 traveling from Rome to Naples and then north to the Swiss Alps. They were likely following Turner’s trail, as Moran drew Castle Gandolfo, Naples, the Bay of Baiae, Pozzuoli, Palestrina, and Lake Nemi in the south, before heading north to Florence, Lake Albano, and Lake Como. The couple returned to France by way of the St. Gotthard Pass, arriving back in Paris in time for the opening of the Exposition Universelle on April 1, 1867. Moran displayed two paintings in the American section, including his Autumn on the Conemaugh, Pennsylvania and Children of the Mountains, which he transported from Philadelphia. He also exhibited a painting in the 1867 Salon, which was listed in the catalogue simply as Une forêt en Amerique.

Attending both the 1867 Exposition Universelle and Paris Salon was an enlightening experience for an impressionable American art student such as Nimmo Moran, offering her an unprecedented opportunity to study Barbizon painting. Art historian Peter Bermingham has noted that, “the crucial years of 1866 and 1867 represented the apogee of Barbizon popularity in France…all of the Barbizon artists were copiously represented at the International Exposition and at the Salons. Troyon was given a large retrospective show in Paris in 1866, and the following year brought a similar honor to the aging Rousseau, who had been received in the court of Napoleon III in 1866.” Although Bermingham asserts that “the only American in Paris [in 1867] who would prove to be a major contributor to future developments in American

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96 For a complete list of Thomas Moran’s Italian sketches, see Morand, Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 32-34 and Anderson, 192-193.
98 This painting is most likely Thomas Moran’s The Woods Were God’s First Temples (1867, The Haggin Museum, Stockton, California), reproduced in Anderson, 30.
landscape painting was Winslow Homer (American, 1836-1910), who wandered through the Barbizon-filled International Exposition,” Moran and Nimmo Moran were also present.100 While Moran’s epic representations of the American West had a significant impact on the development of the American Sublime, Nimmo Moran’s intimate, expressive landscapes, which were profoundly influenced by the paintings and prints of the Barbizon School, contributed to the rise of American Tonalism.

In May 1867, the Morans returned to Philadelphia, where they lived for the next three years. After their eleven-month European sojourn, Moran struggled to find his artistic way, as he worked to reconcile the lessons he learned abroad with the Anglo-American style he had previously developed. His ledger indicates that he was frequently reworking his compositions or abandoning unsatisfactory works entirely.101 Art historian Anne Morand notes that his “paintings of this period [satisfied] neither his public nor himself.”102 On at least one occasion, he recorded the sale of a painting in exchange for “$50 in cash 100 in trade for clothing.”103

The couple may have been struggling financially after their time abroad and Moran soon sought out new avenues of income. He pursued teaching opportunities, returning to the PSDW where he lectured on oil painting in spring 1870.104 He also explored the possibilities of commercial printmaking, producing a series of original black and white lithographs for publication in a portfolio titled Studies and Pictures by Thomas Moran.105 His foray into

101 Wilkins, 68-69 and Anderson, 356.
104 Ibid., 195.
105 Moran likely learned the lithographic process from either Edward or Peter Moran, both of whom apprenticed in lithography shops. Between 1859 and 1869, Moran produced approximately forty original lithographs, although
lithography speaks to his entrepreneurial spirit, as he aimed to expand his earning potential through new opportunities and new media.

While Moran continued to confront the aesthetic and financial challenges of his life as a professional artist, Nimmo Moran encountered a very different set of hurdles in her pursuit of an artistic career. On June 16, 1867, approximately one month after their return from Europe, she gave birth to the couple’s first daughter and second child Mary Scott Moran. Three years later on August 20, 1870, Ruth Bedford Moran, their second daughter and third child, was born. As the wife of a professional artist and mother of three young children, familial and domestic duties soon interfered with her artistic output.

Striking a balance between wife, mother, and professional was one of the greatest challenges facing women artists of the nineteenth century, yet it was a challenge that Nimmo Moran would eventually overcome. Over the course of the next decade, she experimented with a variety of media, including wood engraving, watercolor, oil painting, and etching, honing her interpretive abilities and developing a personal style. Her production, however, was somewhat sporadic and intermittent, as she worked to manage her varied and seemingly contradictory roles as wife, mother, and professional artist. Yet the lessons she learned in the 1860s as her “husband’s pupil” remained relevant and influential throughout her career.

CHAPTER 2: ART AND LIFE IN THE 1870s

“Woman, Companion, Homemaker, Mother, Artist, Friend”

In 1876, Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran were photographed in their home-studio in Newark, New Jersey (figure 2.1), where they lived between 1871 and 1880.\(^1\) Dressed in a dark suit and seated in a Gothic revival side chair, Moran holds a round palette, paintbrushes, and a mahlstick – symbols of his status as a professional painter. He pauses momentarily, turning to meet the gaze of the viewer, who has interrupted the artist at work on a landscape painting. Sunlight floods the studio, entering through an unseen window on the right, bathing his canvas and easel in natural light.

Moran is surrounded by an array of “props,” each conveying an important element of his artistic practice: a woven basket holding a painter’s palette and wiping rags sits at the base of his easel, signs of his active artistic labor; two rugs adorn the room, an ornamental Turkish carpet and a geometric-patterned American Indian runner, souvenirs of his international travels and western explorations; books are strewn upon the floor and a lute is propped against the far wall, revealing that he is a learned man not only in art, but also in literature and music; large swaths of drapery and a decorative folding screen embellished with a floral still life add to the studio’s artful atmosphere; and a variety of plants are set upon the windowsill, stand-ins for nature, the source of the artist’s inspiration.

Mary Nimmo Moran sits behind her husband, reclining slightly in a state of reverie as she rests her head upon her left hand in a melancholic pose. She gazes over Moran’s shoulder, lost in

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\(^1\) The Morans moved to Newark, New Jersey, in the winter 1871, settling first at 61 Sherman Avenue, before moving into a home at 166 Brunswick Street. In 1872, the family relocated into a new home-studio located at 9 Thomas Street in Newark, where this photograph (figure 2.1) was taken. Moran is believed to have moved his family from Philadelphia to Newark in order to be closer to the publishing industry in New York City. Nancy K. Anderson, *Thomas Moran* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 52 and 200.
thought, as she contemplates the landscape upon which he works. Undisturbed by the viewer’s
presence, she averts her gaze, allowing us to look at her without the threat of looking back. She
is another important “prop” in Moran’s studio – an essential element of his artistic practice.
Although her positioning behind him suggests her secondary status – she is literally seated in her
husband’s shadow – it also speaks to her role as a supporter and facilitator.

Neither artist kept a diary or journal documenting the nature of their personal and
professional relationship. However, the couple’s youngest daughter Ruth Bedford Moran wrote
biographical essays on her parents in which she credited her mother for much of Moran’s
professional success:

His relationship with Mollie [Mary Nimmo Moran] had always been warm and close and
strong. His career as an artist had been a chief concern of hers; she had watched his work
grow and had done all she could to smooth his way. She had always been his most
helpful critic. She had been a canny manager, moreover, and had taken charge of many
practical matters in order to leave Moran freer for his work.3

She also emphasized that Moran considered his wife to be “the best critic he ever had. She
encouraged all his efforts and aided in developing his almost superhuman capacity for work.
‘When she criticized my pictures,’ he says, ‘she knew why and she was always right.’”4 As a
result, one can interpret Nimmo Moran’s presence in this studio portrait as an acknowledgement
of her vital role in advancing Moran’s career.

Despite the apparent informality of the photograph – enhanced by the Morans’ casual
poses, as well as the creased carpet, scattered rags, and books stacked upon the floor – it was a

2 Ruth Moran later lamented her parents’ poor record keeping: “Both my mother and father were peculiarly lacking
in the quality that keeps a diary (Oh, how I wish they had!), or any ‘books’ or notes or anything that would help me
give real data.” Ruth Moran, “Thomas Moran, Mary Nimmo Moran – Painter Etchers,” Santa Barbara Morning Star
(November 29, 1924): 4, newspaper clipping, B-181, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton
Library, Long Island Collection.
3 Ruth Moran, undated handwritten note, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long
Island Collection.
4 Ruth Moran, Biographical Manuscript on Mary Nimmo Moran, undated, page 4, A 62, Thomas Moran
Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
staged scene, carefully composed to highlight his varied interests in nature, travel, and the arts. The final image conforms to the well-established tradition of the artist’s studio portrait, a genre dating back to the Renaissance, but one that gained considerable interest and attention in the nineteenth century. Prior to photography, studio portraits and self-portraits were typically painted in oil as statements of an artist’s character, intentions, ambitions, and ideals. These works provide a behind-the-scenes look into the mysterious world of the artist’s studio, where genius, creativity, and imagination abound.

Twenty-two years later in 1898, the Morans were photographed in their winter studio, which was then located at 37 West 22nd Street in New York City (figure 2.2). As in the 1876 photograph, Moran is seated at the center of the composition holding a palette as he works on a monumental Venetian seascape. He is surrounded by studio “props,” including a small table with paintbrushes and several canvases in various states of completion. The most striking similarity, however, is the presence and position of Mary Nimmo Moran. Wearing a tailored day dress, fashionable hat, and fur muff, she turns slightly away from the viewer, allowing us once again to look without looking back. She is presented as a passive female figure, gazing over her husband’s shoulder as he pursues his artistic ambitions.

While the Morans do not acknowledge our presence, an oil portrait of Mary Nimmo Moran (1883, figure 2.3), painted by artist Hamilton Hamilton (American, 1847-1928), hangs on the studio’s left wall. In this portrait, Nimmo Moran directly engages the viewer, turning confidently to meet our gaze in a forthright gesture of self-assurance. In the two decades that passed between the two photographs, Nimmo Moran emerged as a preeminent printmaker and influential interpreter of the American landscape. In 1889, critic Elizabeth Bisland painted a

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more accurate picture of the couple at work in their studio. Reporting in *The Cosmopolitan*, Bisland wrote: “Thomas Moran the etcher, and Mary Nimmo, his wife, work side by side down in their studio on Twenty-second Street. Big tables near the light, on which are laid the plates while the artists are at work, are an important feature of their furnishings; but there are easels too, for before either of them was an etcher they were painters.”

As Bisland’s description indicates, the studio was a shared space in which both artists created paintings and prints. Nevertheless, when photographed, this space was presented as Moran’s – dominated by the artist and examples of his work. Nimmo Moran’s body language and physical positioning speaks to her secondary status, visualizing the challenges she faced balancing her varied roles as wife and artist, woman and professional. Even as she earned critical renown, she was never represented in either a painted or photographic portrait as a working, professional artist. Instead, it was her role as Moran’s wife, assistant, supporter, and facilitator that was visually documented for posterity.

The dynamics of the Morans’ relationship were not unique. Many women artists in the nineteenth century were married to successful male artists and they were similarly required to negotiate their conflicting roles and responsibilities. Art historian Kirsten Swinth had argued that, “marriage required a complicated negotiation of costs and benefits for women. Professional lives already violated the Victorian belief that women’s primary duty was to family and home; combining a career with marriage required even greater contravention of gender norms.” As a result, many women artists, either consciously or not, chose to remain in their husbands’ shadows as to not upset traditional gender roles or overstep the prescribed boundaries of their sex. In her pursuit of an artistic career, Nimmo Moran always maintained the gender hierarchies

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of her marriage, as evidenced in her assertion: “I may say I have always been my husband’s pupil.”

The deference and respect she showed Moran – personally and professionally – required considerable sacrifices and she often prioritized her husband’s career over her own artistic aspirations.

The 1870s marks the beginning of Thomas Moran’s extensive western travels, during which time he emerged as one of America’s most influential landscape painters. Nimmo Moran traveled with her husband on a few occasions, making it as far west as California, as far south as Florida, and as far north as Niagara Falls. Yet her ability to travel and produce art was limited by her husband’s ambitions: Moran’s excursions typically lasted several months, requiring Nimmo Moran to remain at home in order to maintain the household and care for their three children. The commitment she demonstrated to her domestic obligations at the expense of her own artistic productivity made much of Moran’s success possible.

Nimmo Moran’s assistance came in the form of domestic work, including housekeeping and childrearing, as well as professional support: she managed business and social affairs, supplied critical advice, and aided Moran in the production of artworks, principally his wood engraved illustrations. Moran’s remarkable productivity – beginning in the 1870s and continuing for the next thirty years – must be understood as the direct result of Nimmo Moran’s sustained

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8 Mary Nimmo Moran, Incomplete Autobiographical Sketch, undated, A 60, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
and dedicated efforts. As Ruth Moran later noted, her mother’s sacrifices and assistance ensured that Thomas Moran could devote himself entirely to his art free from distraction:

She [Mary Nimmo Moran] was never a prolific painter, as her children and home and numberless friends [were] always coming to the Newark home when in need of help or a temporary abiding place filled her days too full, and always she was assisting and criticising [sic] her husband in his work. Protecting and stimulating him, and giving all that was in her to the developing and flowering of that genius that she had always seen was in Thomas Moran and that in a great measure owed its almost superhuman versatility, and productiveness to the great love, that always stood between him and the little petty troubles of “just living.” The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, some one must see them, and that some one, was this buisy [sic] woman, companion, homemaker, mother, artist, friend.¹⁰

Writing in 1900, artist Anna Lea Merritt (American, 1844-1930) astutely noted that pursuing a professional career was especially challenging without the assistance of a wife. In “A Letter to Artists: Especially Women Artists,” she addressed this critical difficulty slowing women’s progress:

The chief obstacle to a woman’s success is that she can never have a wife. Just reflect what a wife does for an artist: darns the stockings; keeps his house; writes his letters; visits for his benefit; wards off intruders; is personally suggestive of beautiful pictures; always an encouraging and partial critic. It is exceedingly difficult to be an artist without this time-saving help. A husband would be quite useless. He would never do any of these disagreeable things.¹¹

Merritt’s list of disagreeable chores closely echoes Ruth Moran’s descriptions of her mother’s manifold responsibilities as a busy “woman, companion, homemaker, mother, artist, friend.”

Moreover, extant correspondence reveals that Nimmo Moran shared her husband’s entrepreneurial spirit: in addition to her role as wife, mother, and artist, she pursued opportunities for supplemental income. In a letter to artist Helena de Kay Gilder (American, 1846-1916), Nimmo Moran outlined her preoccupation with domestic work and a new business venture:

I never had so many things to do...I have been trying to make little carpets fit big rooms and new dresses out of old ones for the children until I hardly know what I am about. Then I had to get my studio in order for My Class and opened the season last Wednesday. There is only five now but I expect two or three more. I have nice little desks for them to draw on and Tom invested about twenty dollars in modles [sic] for me, so you see I have gone right into business.\textsuperscript{12}

Teaching a drawing class in her Newark studio, presumably for children, was a means by which she could contribute to the family’s income and throughout her career she remained particularly attuned to the necessity of earning a living through art making.

**The Morans and the American West**

In winter 1870, Richard Watson Gilder (American, 1844-1909), managing editor of the art department at *Scribner’s Monthly*, commissioned Thomas Moran to execute a series of wood engraved illustrations that were to accompany Nathaniel P. Langford’s article “Wonders of the Yellowstone.”\textsuperscript{13} Although Moran’s name would subsequently become synonymous with the region, when Gilder commissioned him to illustrate the article he had not yet traveled west of Michigan. As a result, he based his illustrations on the drawings of amateur artists Walter Trumbull and Private Charles Moore, two members of the Washburn-Doane expedition who had traveled to Yellowstone in 1870.\textsuperscript{14}

Trumbull and Moore’s sketches were among the earliest artistic renderings of Yellowstone: once enhanced and reworked by Moran, they were published alongside Langford’s written descriptions in *Scribner’s*. The two-part article attracted considerable attention and public interest, most notably with geologist Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden. Following the article’s

\textsuperscript{12} Mary Nimmo Moran, letter to Helena de Kay Gilder, undated [likely 1879], box 12, folder M. 20, Richard Watson Gilder Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

\textsuperscript{13} Issued in two parts, Langford’s article included thirty-two illustrations by Moran. He likely drew these works directly onto woodblocks since *Scribner’s* typically refused illustrations that were drawn on paper. This ensured that minimal modifications were made to the artist’s design, yet the original drawings were lost in the engraving process. Nathaniel P. Langford, “The Wonders of the Yellowstone,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 2, no. 1 and no. 2 (May-June 1871): 1-17 and 113-128; and Joni Kinsey, “Moran and the Art of Publishing,” in Anderson, 373, n. 12.

publication, Hayden welcomed Moran as a guest on his U.S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Territories to Yellowstone in the summer 1871. While out west, Moran executed a series of contour drawings and watercolors that served as the raw materials for his first great western painting *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (1872, figure 2.4).

A savvy self-promoter, Moran generated press and publicity for the painting by welcoming visitors and critics into his Newark studio to preview the work as he completed it. In April 1872, *The Newark Daily Advertiser* announced that, “Mr. Thomas Moran will be happy to receive at his studio… on Tuesday afternoon and evening, all of his Newark friends… who may desire to see [the painting], before it leaves the city.” Nimmo Moran played an important role in coordinating the large number of visitors that came to see her husband’s work. While Moran dedicated his time and energy to completing this monumental canvas, which measures seven feet tall by twelve feet wide, she was responsible for welcoming guests into the studio and facilitating the behind-the-scenes activities that contributed to the painting’s widespread popularity.

Ruth Moran documented her mother’s role in organizing the social, artistic, and professional scene at the Morans’ Newark studio, where the couple hosted weekly salon-style gatherings of noteworthy artists and intellectuals:

> This home of Thomas Moran’s in Newark N.J., was the gathering place of all the men who were builders of the Century Magazine. Mrs. Moran drew all these people together with that unbounded hospitality [sic] that always made her home in Phila[delphia], a gathering place for men and women of brains and ability. Here even to breakfast came young Richard Watson Gilder, and his sister Jeanette, one of the most brilliant of wits… Alexander Drake, and later Underwood Johnson, E.C. Stedman, the author, Monseignor [sic] Doane, whose brother was the Episcopal Bishop of New York, George Macdonald, the story writer, young Frederick Dielman and Walter Shirlaw just back from Munich came all the way from New York week after week.17

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An important meeting place for prominent New Yorkers from all walks of life, the Morans’ home-studio provided a space for the exchange of art and ideas. Nimmo Moran was at the center of these activities, as both hostess and participant.

In June 1872, Moran sold *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* to the United States Congress for $10,000 and the painting was subsequently installed in the Capitol.  

This was a major turning point in the artist’s career and it had far-reaching implications – financially, socially, and professionally – for the Moran family. In the summer 1872, he was invited to join the government surveys of Hayden, who was returning to Yellowstone, and Major John Wesley Powell, who was leading an expedition to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. Moran declined both opportunities, insisting that he was overwhelmed with illustration commissions.  

Yet in a surprising turn of events, the artist decided to head west slightly later in the season, departing for his second western excursion on August 24, 1872. Accompanied by Mary Nimmo Moran, he recorded the trip in his “Old Book of Lists,” writing: “Mrs M & I went to the Yo Semite in August 1872 & made a number of pencil & ink sketches & 4 sketches in water colors.” Lasting six weeks, this was Nimmo Moran’s first and only visit to the American West. The couple left their home in Newark, New Jersey, traveling by train through Chicago and across the prairie lands of Iowa on their way to Omaha, Nebraska, where they boarded the Union Pacific Railroad. From Omaha they traveled to Ogden, Utah, where they transferred to the Central Pacific Railroad headed west to California. The Morans stopped in San Francisco and

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18 On June 10, 1872, Congress acted “to enable the joint committee on the library to purchase Moran’s large painting of the Canyon of the Yellowstone, ten thousand dollars.” Statutes 1871/1873, 17:347, 362 quoted in Anderson, 204.  
20 Moran’s “Old Book of Lists” indicates that they returned from Yosemite on October 5, 1872. Anderson, 205.  
possibly Oakland before reaching Yosemite Valley, their final destination. They spent the next several weeks drawing Yosemite’s famed sites, including North Dome, South Dome (now known as Half Dome), Glacier Point, Bridalveil Fall, Vernal Fall, Nevada Fall, Yosemite Falls, the Sentinel, and El Capitan.

Although western exploration is typically discussed as a male-dominated enterprise, in the second half of the nineteenth century women played an important role in settling the frontier and disseminating images of and information about the American West. Female writers and artists were particularly influential in shaping the history of Yosemite Valley: in 1870, author Thérèse Yelverton spent the summer in Yosemite, an experience that inspired her novel *Daughters of the Ahwahnee*, later renamed *Zanita: A Tale of the Yo-Semite* (1871). The book’s main characters were loosely based on the individuals Yelverton met in Yosemite, including naturalist John Muir, who inspired the character Kenmuir. Yelverton’s novel popularized Yosemite in the imagination of eastern audiences, many of whom would later visit the valley for themselves. This included several female painters and photographers, such as Mary Nimmo Moran and Mary Winslow, as well as adventurers Kitty Tatch and Katherine Hazelston.

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22 Thomas Moran provided one illustration of Oakland, California, for publication in *Picturesque America*. Based on the existence of this illustration, Wilkins assumes that the couple visited Oakland. Yet Moran may have based his illustration on a photograph, as he did for many of his *Picturesque America* illustrations. The couple did, however, visit San Francisco, as confirmed in a letter from Thomas Moran to Mary Nimmo Moran written the following summer: “The mountains are of the same character as those you saw on the way to San Francisco.” Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Fillmore City, Utah, July 17, 1873, reprinted in Amy O. Bassford, ed., *Home- Thoughts, from Afar; Letters of Thomas Moran to Mary Nimmo Moran* (East Hampton: East Hampton Free Library, 1967), 33.

23 Anne Morand proposes that the Morans stayed at the Glacier Point Hotel while in Yosemite. However, the hotel’s construction was not completed until 1873 and it did not begin regularly receiving guests until spring 1877. Yosemite hotels where the Morans may have stayed in 1872 include Black’s Hotel, Leidig’s Hotel, Hutchings House, Lower Hotel, La Casa Nevada, and the Cosmopolitan Bath-House and Saloon. Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches*, 39 and Hank Johnston, “McCauley’s Glacier Point Mountain House,” *Yosemite Association* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 3.


famously performed a high kick from Overhanging Rock, three thousand feet above the valley floor (figure 2.5).

The first artists arrived in Yosemite in the early 1860s, yet when the Morans traveled there a decade later it was already a popular tourist destination and had undergone a number of transportation and recreation improvements. This included the establishment of several privately run trails, such as the Four Mile Trail built by James McCauley in 1872.  

This trail runs from the valley floor to Glacier Point (an elevation of 7,214 feet) and offers spectacular views of Half Dome and Yosemite Falls. Writer Helen Hunt Jackson (American, 1830-1885) described her experience on the trail shortly after its completion: “It is a marvelous piece of work. It is broad, smooth, and well-protected on the outer edge, in all dangerous places, by large rocks…one rides up it with little alarm or giddiness, and with such a sense of gratitude to the builder that the dollar’s toll seems too small.”  

The Morans may have ascended the trail while in Yosemite since at least one of the works Thomas Moran completed on the trip appears to have been executed from Glacier Point.  

Moran’s Yosemite works are similar in style and technique to his Yellowstone sketches of the year prior. He executed several contour drawings outlining prominent features in the landscape, often adding composition and color notations specifying where to depict “trees” in the valley or “red spots” on granite rock.  

Several of these studies are horizontal in format, enabling Moran to capture the sweeping breadth of the valley floor. He also produced twelve graphite-and-wash drawings, the majority of which are vertically oriented, emphasizing the soaring

\[26\] Johnston, 2.
\[27\] Helen Hunt Jackson quoted in Ibid.
\[28\] Cat. no. 234 in Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches*, 147.
\[29\] Cat. nos. 232-234, 236-237, and 245-246 in Ibid., 146-149.
heights of Yosemite’s famed rock formations.\textsuperscript{30} Moran added subtle black, gray, and blue washes to his pencil sketches and incorporated white gouache accents to indicate snow capped mountains or cascading waterfalls. In one work, inscribed on the verso as depicting “The North Domes / Washington Column / & Royal Arch / from the vernal fall stream / looking down / YoSemite Valley,” he included the silhouette of a small figure seated atop a boulder (figure 2.6). The figure provides a sense of scale, emphasizing the monumentality of the foreground rocks and dramatic height of the distant mountains. Although it is difficult to definitively assert the figure’s gender, it may be a representation of his traveling companion, Mary Nimmo Moran.

There are two extant works that Nimmo Moran produced in Yosemite Valley. The first is a study in black and gray wash (figure 2.7), which was likely executed on the spot and appears to represent the same site featured in Moran’s watercolor \textit{Yosemite, South [Half] Dome} (figure 2.8). In both works, an outcropping of jagged rocks, flanked on the right by pine trees, is set against the rising peaks of a distant mountain. While Moran adopted an elevated perspective, allowing the viewer to survey the scene from a distance, Nimmo Moran chose a much closer point of view.\textsuperscript{31} In her work, the viewer stands amidst the boulders at the cliff’s edge; she cropped the distant snow capped mountains out of the composition, focusing our attention on the nearest mountain peaks. She included only two spruce trees on the right, simplifying the composition and paring it down to far fewer elements than are present in Moran’s work. Throughout her career, Nimmo Moran’s preference for intimate views over panoramic perspectives differentiated her works from those of her husband.

\textsuperscript{30} Cat. nos. 235, 238-244, and 247-250 in Morand, \textit{Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches}, 146-150.
\textsuperscript{31} Kinsey argues that Thomas Moran’s elevated perspective can be read as “a ‘magisterial gaze’ or ‘prospect’ that invited a sense of ownership and conveyed the idea of the availability and potential of the land.” Kinsey, “Moran and the Art of Publishing,” in Anderson, 308.
She did, however, share Moran’s interest in detailing the individuality of natural forms. This is evident in the study’s foreground, where she paid close attention to the unique shape and texture of each boulder, using subtle tonal variations to convincingly replicate the distinctive patterns of the rock striations. Art historian Joni Kinsey has noted that rock “portraits” were popular with survey photographers and western artists in the 1860s and 1870s, including William Henry Jackson, Carleton Watkins, and Moran.\(^{32}\) For many geologists and theoreticians, including John Ruskin, rocks took on cosmic significance and artists often emphasized the gravity-defying qualities of precariously positioned boulders in the western landscape. Although in a biblical context rocks typically symbolize permanence and strength, the seemingly dangerous position of irregular rock formations – as seen in Nimmo Moran’s wash drawing – emphasizes nature’s potential for transformation and transition, themes that appropriately convey the changing character of the American West.\(^{33}\)

In addition to the wash drawing, Nimmo Moran executed a watercolor of Yosemite Falls (figure 2.9). Measuring 2,425 feet high, Yosemite Falls is composed of three separate falls (Upper Yosemite Fall, the middle cascades, and Lower Yosemite Fall), which are visible from several vantage points throughout the valley. In contrast to her wash drawing, Nimmo Moran adopted a distanced perspective in order to emphasize the verticality of the landscape. The viewer stands on the valley floor before a shallow pool of water that narrows as it recedes to the base of the lower fall. Painted in thin washes of blue, red, and brown, the water’s surface reflects the colors and forms of the surrounding landscape. The lush foliage of the valley floor, executed in shades of green and brown with white gouache highlights, is set against a rising mass of

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\(^{32}\) In addition to the rock, Kinsey notes that the arch, the tower, and the tree are four prominent motifs in Moran’s oeuvre that take on metaphorical associations, referencing biblical, historical, and cultural sources. For a detailed discussion of these four typological devices, see Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 20–40.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 39-40.
granite rock, thinly outlined in graphite and partially shaded in a blue-gray wash. Nimmo Moran captured the serenity of Yosemite’s unspoiled landscape. The quiet solitude that pervades the scene contrasts with Moran’s sublime representations of the valley, seen for example in his *Waterfall in Yosemite* (figure 2.10), in which the current of a rushing cataract threatens to inundate the viewer.

Aside from the couple’s studies and watercolors, written documentation related to their journey is minimal and scholars have debated the impetus behind the trip. Biographer Thurman Wilkins proposed that the couple’s itinerary was determined by Moran’s commission to illustrate an article on “The Plains and the Sierras” in *Picturesque America*. However, as art historian Anne Morand has noted, there are no letters, contracts, or business records to support Wilkins’ claim and the artist’s extant fieldwork does not correspond to the illustrations he ultimately provided for the publication. Instead, Morand argues that the trip was inspired by a simple desire to visit Yosemite, which he may have hoped would result in future commissions.

The theories set forth by Wilkins and Morand fail to consider the presence of Mary Nimmo Moran and it has heretofore been assumed that she was simply along for the ride. However, subsequent correspondence reveals that she may have accompanied her husband for educational and professional purposes. In summer 1873 – one year after the couple traveled to Yosemite – Thomas Moran joined Major John Wesley Powell’s survey expedition to the Grand Canyon. Prior to his trip, Moran wrote to Hayden that he had “made a number of contracts to

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furnish pictures of the region, amounting in all to about 100.”

While traveling, Moran wrote several letters to his wife, describing the spectacular scenery, as well as the hardships of the journey. On at least two occasions, he encouraged her to continue her artistic training in his absence: writing from Salt Lake City, Utah, on July 9, 1873, Moran noted: “I hope the children will keep well so that you will have an opportunity to study while I am away.” Five weeks later, he urged her to “work hard to improve your drawing dear as I shall have plenty of work for you this coming winter. 70 drawings for Powell, 40 for Appleton, 4 for Aldine, 20 for Scribners all from this region beside the water colors and oil pictures.”

As this correspondence suggests, Moran enlisted the assistance of his wife in order to fulfill commissions for his illustrations. As a result, the couple may have visited Yosemite so that Nimmo Moran could familiarize herself with the western scenery that she would subsequently aid her husband in illustrating. Moreover, Moran understood that the market for western imagery was growing – in both the United States and Europe – and he may have hoped that a western trip would enable his wife to tap into the market and obtain commissions of her own.

Additionally, Moran’s letters reveal that their marriage was a strong bond based on mutual affection, respect, and a shared interest in art and travel. Moran’s trip to Yellowstone in 1871 had a profound impact on the artist and he clearly wanted to share such an experience with his wife, exposing her to the magnificent scenery of the American West that forever changed the

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36 Thomas Moran, letter to F.V. Hayden, June 28, 1873, Hayden Incoming Correspondence, National Archives, Washington, D.C. quoted in Anderson, 207.
37 Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 9, 1873, reprinted in Bassford, 30.
38 Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Ibid., 41-42.
39 Mary Nimmo Moran may have assisted her husband in completing the illustrations he provided for *Picturesque America*, as well as scenes of Utah and California that were later published in *Scribner’s* and *The Aldine*. See, for example, Benjamin P. Avery, “The Geysers of California,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 6, no. 6 (October 1873): 641-651 and “Utah Scenery,” *The Aldine* 7, no. 1 (January 1874): 10 and 14-15.
40 Mary Nimmo Moran wrote letters to her husband while he traveled out West, which he confirmed receiving on at least one occasion: “I have just received your letters, 4 in all, and the first I have gotten,...I am so glad that everything is alright with you.” Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Bassford, 41. If Moran saved Nimmo Moran’s letters, their location is currently unknown.
course of his career. Nimmo Moran also shared her husband’s love of nature, as evidenced in a letter in which Moran stated, “You would just go wild over what there is to see here [in the Grand Canyon] and it is perfectly safe though a pretty hard trip to make.”\(^{41}\) Several of his letters indicate that Moran longed for his wife to accompany him on his western travels – “I only wish you were here dear Molly” – and he may have hoped that their Yosemite trip would be the first of many joint excursions.\(^{42}\) In August 1873, Moran wrote to “Molly” from the northern rim of the Grand Canyon, insisting that, “If I come down here again you must come too.”\(^{43}\)

Moran’s letters often allude to the couple’s cross-country trip, providing Nimmo Moran with familiar points of reference. On July 5, 1873, he wrote from Cheyenne, Wyoming, that “the plains look like they did last year except a little greener” and later that month from Fillmore City, Utah, he explained that “the Mormon towns that we have passed through are made of the unbaked brick that you saw at Green River and are all situated in the Sage Plains…the mountains are of the same character as those you saw on the way to San Francisco and the plains are the same so you know just the kind of country we are in.”\(^{44}\) Although Moran may have invoked such memories to entice his wife to join him out west, she never made a second trip.

Wilkins suggests that this was the result of “exhaustion and ailing health…the whole western excursion overtaxed her strength.”\(^{45}\) However, there is no documentation to support his claim and he provides no citation for this assertion. Given the number of women who traveled west in the 1870s and the popularity of sites such as Yosemite as tourist destinations, it should not be assumed that it was her feminine frailty that kept her from returning. She accompanied her

\(^{41}\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Bassford, 41.
\(^{42}\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 9, 1873, reprinted in Ibid., 30.
\(^{43}\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Ibid., 41.
\(^{44}\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Cheyenne, Wyoming, July 5, 1873, and Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Fillmore City, Utah, July 17, 1873, reprinted in Ibid., 27 and 33.
\(^{45}\) Wilkins, 112.
husband on several trips throughout the 1870s and 1880s, including excursions to Wisconsin, Florida, Niagara Falls, and Great Britain. Instead, it is far more likely that her responsibilities as a mother required her to stay home while Moran continued to make extended trips to the American West.

“Work Hard to Improve Your Drawing Dear”

In summer 1873, when Moran wrote to his wife to “work hard to improve your drawing dear as I shall have plenty of work for you this coming winter,” Nimmo Moran was in fact diligently drawing her local landscape, developing her observational skills and drafting abilities.\(^46\) She spent three months – June, July, and August – traveling around the Delaware Water Gap, where the Delaware River cuts through an Appalachian Mountain ridge between New Jersey and Pennsylvania. She produced twenty-three known works, including twenty-one pencil sketches (nineteen of which are bound in a sketchbook) and two wash drawings. Several of these works are carefully dated and labeled with locations, enabling me to track her movements throughout the summer.

While Nimmo Moran was traveling around Pennsylvania’s countryside, contemporary artists Mary Cassatt and Emily Sartain, both of who were born in Pennsylvania, were studying in Paris.\(^47\) Cassatt and Sartain frequently corresponded about their art, their frustrations, their struggles, and their successes, and they certainly benefitted from each other’s support and camaraderie during this formative period in their careers. In contrast, Nimmo Moran was working in relative isolation, as her husband, teacher, and sketching partner, Thomas Moran, was traveling out west. Instead of visiting museums and art collections, attending the Salon and

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\(^{46}\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Bassford, 41-42.

\(^{47}\) For an overview of Mary Cassatt and Emily Sartain’s activities in Europe between 1870 and 1875, see Wendy Bellion, “Chronology,” in *Mary Cassatt, Modern Woman*, Judith A. Barter et al. (New York: Art Institute of Chicago in association with H.N. Abrams, 1998), 331-334.
studying with academics, Nimmo Moran was independently exploring the mountains, valleys, rivers, and forests of eastern Pennsylvania. These divergent experiences had a profound influence on the aesthetic interests and career paths pursued by Nimmo Moran, Cassatt, and Sartain over the next three decades.

Nimmo Moran’s earliest drawings from the summer 1873 were executed in Easton, Pennsylvania. Located approximately sixty miles west of the Morans’ home in Newark, New Jersey, Easton could be reached by way of the Central Railroad of New Jersey and Nimmo Moran most likely traveled there by train. As noted in Chapter One, Mary Nimmo Moran’s great aunt and uncle, Marion Nimmo and William Semple, had emigrated from Scotland around 1825. In 1850, they were living in Plainfield Township, Pennsylvania, but by 1860 had relocated to nearby Easton. Marion and William’s daughter, Agnes Semple, also lived in Easton with her husband George Sweeny, residing at 32 North Second Street in 1873. When Nimmo Moran visited her family that summer, she stayed in the home of Agnes and George Sweeny, which still stands today (figure 2.11).

Easton served as her home base for the summer and from there she made sketching trips throughout the Lehigh Valley, visiting Mauch Chunk, Bloomsbury, and Portland in Pennsylvania, as well as Slate Falls and Cedar Lake in Blairstown, New Jersey. After arriving in Easton in June, she completed three known works, including two plein-air pencil studies of Bushkill Creek (figures 2.12-2.13), a twenty-two-mile-long tributary of the Delaware River, and

50 In a letter to Richard Watson Gilder, Thomas Moran indicates that, “Mrs. Ms address is care Mr. Geo Sweeny, Easton, Penn.” Thomas Moran, letter to Richard Watson Gilder, June 29, 1873, Easton, Penna., box 12, folder M. 20, Richard Watson Gilder Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.
one wash drawing of the Delaware River (figure 2.14). In *Untitled (Easton, June 1873)* (figure 2.12), she drew the banks of the Bushkill with lush, verdant trees arching over the creek creating a natural overhang of branches and leaves. She also included a stone arch, wooden footbridge, and small rowboat – picturesque motifs that indicate the human presence in nature, despite the viewer’s inability to see beyond the forest’s dense foliage.

In contrast, *Untitled (Easton, June 1873)* (figure 2.13) is a more open composition with a view to the horizon. The large rocks and twisted tree trunks in the foreground are rendered with careful detail, while the distant mountain peak is only summarily outlined. This pencil study served as the basis for a vertical wash drawing, which although undated was likely completed in 1873. Titled *Bushkill* (figure 2.15), the scene was first drawn in graphite and then enhanced with black and gray wash and white gouache highlights. The picture is classically composed with a large repoussoir tree in the right foreground, framing the scene and guiding our eye to the Appalachian ridge in the distance.\(^{51}\)

On June 25, 1873, Nimmo Moran completed another wash drawing in Easton (figure 2.14). This work depicts the Delaware River as it winds its way through the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. Mixing graphite, wash, and white gouache on brown paper, the artist presents a more dramatic view of the river valley, adopting an elevated perspective reminiscent of the viewpoint – or “magisterial gaze” – seen in her husband’s western works. Several pencil sketches from this summer were executed from a similar vantage point, as she drew panoramic views of the Delaware Water Gap that belie the small size of her sketchbook.

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\(^{51}\) Mary Nimmo Moran exhibited a watercolor titled *On the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.* at the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society, held at the National Academy of Design in 1881. Although *Bushkill* (figure 2.15) may be the work she exhibited, the exhibition catalogue does not include dimensions making it difficult to definitively identify the work that was shown. Cat. no. 204 in *Illustrated Catalogue of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society* (New York: The Society, 1881), 15.
In *Pat Rock on the Delaware, Easton, August 1, 1873* (figure 2.16) and *Portland on the Delaware, August 9, 1873* (figure 2.17), she adopted a bird’s eye perspective, overlooking the river as it slowly snakes through the rounded peaks of the Great Appalachian Valley. In the latter work, she included signs of man’s encroachment upon nature: on the left, a small house and road are visible, and a single track of railroad runs alongside the river. Despite this “encroachment,” the railroad does not detract from the scene, instead fitting seamlessly into the landscape as it cuts through a line of trees and guides our eye to the distance.

In July 1873, Nimmo Moran spent several days drawing in Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania (present-day Jim Thorpe), a small but picturesque mining town in the lower Lehigh Valley. Nicknamed the “Switzerland of America,” Mauch Chunk – a derivative of the Lenape Indian term for Bear Mountain – was founded in 1818 by the Lehigh Coal Mining Company. By mid-century, it was a bustling transportation hub for railways and canal boats moving coal – America’s “black diamonds” – from nearby mines to the industrial cities of the Northeast. Home to a number of Gilded Age millionaires who made their fortunes in coal mining, Mauch Chunk soon developed into a tourist destination, boasting several upscale hotels, as well as the popular attraction of the Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway – an eighteen-mile gravity railroad built in 1827 to carry coal from the mines of Summit Hill to the Lehigh Canal. By 1872, a more efficient means of transporting coal was developed, but the Switchback Railway remained open to tourists, many of whom traveled from New York City to ride what was advertised as “The Oldest Railroad in America” and “The Most Wonderful 18 Mile Ride Upon the Continent.”

In 1871, *Appleton’s Journal* declared Mauch Chunk to be “one of the most picturesque towns in the Union” and it was featured in the journal’s serial publication “Picturesque

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52 Carrying passengers on a “thrill ride,” the Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway is often considered to be the earliest roller coaster in America. It inspired the construction of amusement park rides, such as the Switchback Railway that opened in Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York, in 1884.
Comparing Mauch Chunk to a “Swiss-like village,” Appleton’s highlighted the town’s unique geography, industrial history, and main tourist attraction, the “Gravity Railway.” The article was accompanied by the illustrations of artist Harry Fenn (American, 1837-1911), one of which depicts a view of the town nestled in the foothills of Mount Pisgah (figure 2.18). Trains, canal boats, and barges are visible in the landscape, as he captured the bustling industrial activity, which the article’s author described as continuing “ceaselessly day and night [as] the long, black coal trains come winding round the base of the hills, like so many huge anacondas.”

Yet it was the Switchback Railway that made Mauch Chunk a tourist destination. Appleton’s declared that, “there can be no more pleasing a short pleasure-trip than to Mauch Chunk. It is reached in five hours from New York.” Such an endorsement popularized the town with tourists looking for a quick urban escape and the article may have prompted Nimmo Moran’s visit in 1873. From Easton, she could make the approximately thirty-five-mile journey to Mauch Chunk on the Lehigh and Susquehanna Railroad and her surviving sketches indicate that she visited the town on two occasions.

Her earliest drawing of Mauch Chunk, dated June 11, 1873 (figure 2.19), depicts a view of the Lehigh River from a similar, although slightly lower, vantage point than that featured in Fenn’s illustration (figure 2.18). Vertical in orientation, the scene is framed on the left by a group of trees, one of which arcs over distant Mount Pisgah echoing the bend in the river. Railroad

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54 In addition to Fenn’s illustration, photographer George F. Gates (American, active 1860s-1890s) documented Mauch Chunk and the Switchback Railway in a series of stereographs. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Photography Collection at the New York Public Library currently holds a collection of Gates’ photographs.

55 “A Visit to Mauch Chunk,” 94.

56 Ibid., 96.
tracks, buildings, and cast iron bridges are visible, as is Mauch Chunk’s church and steeple. One month later, she executed a second study (figure 2.20) from a similar vantage point, but this time turned the paper horizontally to better capture the depth of the valley. In the distance, Mount Pisgah rises with a building and two chimneys visible at its peak. On the side of the mountain, she inscribed the word “train,” a reminder of where to include the tracks of the Switchback Railway. Her inclusion of compositional notations reveals her training with Moran, who frequently annotated his field sketches with color and composition notes.

Over the next two days, she drew additional views of Mauch Chunk, moving around the valley to capture the town from different perspectives (figures 2.21). In each instance, she included signs of modern industry – from freight cars and riverboats carrying coal to telegraph poles, railroad tracks, and cast iron bridges. Although the natural landscape plays an important role in these studies, the artist paid close attention to accurately documenting industrial objects and structures, while trees and mountains are often summarily sketched and outlined. Her depiction of industrial activity is in marked contrast to Moran, who erased signs of modernity from his field studies. For instance, in summer 1871, Moran completed a series of studies in Green River, Wyoming, that do not acknowledge the presence of commerce, industry, or the railroad in the landscape. When compared to contemporary photographs of Green River taken by artists such as William Henry Jackson and Andrew Russell – both of whom photographed technological advancement in the region – it is clear that Moran consciously omitted signs of industry, favoring instead the unadulterated landscape.

August proved to be a particularly prolific month for Nimmo Moran, who produced ten studies between August 1 and August 9, 1873. She traveled first to Bloomsbury, New Jersey,  

57 Cat. nos. 202-203 in Morand, Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 142-143.  
58 This approach can also be seen in Thomas Moran’s earliest field studies of Pennsylvania, which were executed along the railroad but never acknowledge its presence in the landscape. Ibid., 36
approximately nine miles east of Easton, where she executed studies featuring individual trees and rocks (figure 2.22). Isolated from the larger landscape, these carefully delineated works reveal the influence of Ruskin – an advocate of painstaking observation and detailed nature studies – as well as Moran, who produced several preliminary tree and rock “portraits” that later made their way into finished compositions. From Bloomsbury, she traveled to Blairstown, New Jersey, where she drew five works depicting Slate Falls and Cedar Lake (figures 2.23-2.26). These studies reveal her continued interest in the forest interior, which she drew with increasing confidence and success as the summer progressed.

As she “worked hard to improve her drawing,” her handling of natural forms and compositional arrangements became more finished and complex. Works such as Slate Falls, Aug. 5, 1873 (figure 2.23) and Cedar Lake, Aug. 6, 1873 (figure 2.27) indicate her ardent study of rivers, mountains, and trees, which she convincingly portrays in intricately composed compositions. Her attention to light and shadow, conveyed through nuanced modeling and shading, demonstrates her artistic development, as well as her growing familiarity with the natural environment. The last surviving studies of the summer were executed in Portland, Pennsylvania, on August 9, 1873 (figures 2.17 and 2.28), after which she returned to Newark, New Jersey, in time to welcome her husband home from the Grand Canyon and prepare for the illustrative work of the coming winter.

From panoramic views of the Delaware River to individual tree studies, Nimmo Moran’s field sketches illustrate her continued commitment to studying art and nature. Through careful scrutiny of the landscape, she improved her interpretive skills and knowledge of nature – the foundation upon which she built her success as an etcher. When she returned to Easton in the
summer 1879, the landscape she diligently studied six years prior provided the inspiration for her first *plein-air* etchings.

**Wood Engravings and Illustrations**

It is estimated that throughout his career, Thomas Moran produced over 2,000 images for publication, the majority of which were reproduced as wood engravings, although there are also examples of steel engravings, lithographs, chromolithographs, and photographically produced halftones.\(^{59}\) Moran’s prodigious output seems far more feasible when we consider Nimmo Moran’s assistance. Although the artist had “plenty of work” for his wife, her exact involvement remains something of a mystery since he never publicly acknowledged their collaboration and she was never credited in print for the images she had a hand in producing. With no additional written documentation, it remains nearly impossible to concretely prove her contributions, although as both Kinsey and Anderson have noted, her assistance was undoubtedly more substantial than has previously been acknowledged.\(^{60}\)

In December 1873, Moran wrote to Powell, “I am awfully pleased with drawing on wood and have to work every night until one or two o’clock.”\(^{61}\) Five years later, the artist estimated that he had produced “about 400 or 500 illustrations on wood, nearly all done at night.”\(^{62}\) While he painted during the day, his evenings were dedicated to illustrative work, as lighting and color were of lesser importance. Moran typically drew his illustrations directly onto woodblocks and Nimmo Moran likely assisted her husband in this line of work. Utilizing his sketches and watercolors, as well as survey photographs, she may have copied finished compositions onto

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60 Ibid., and Anderson, 370, n. 32.
62 Thomas Moran quoted in Ibid., 319.
woodblocks or perhaps had the freedom to compose images to which Moran then added details and finishing touches.

By 1873, Nimmo Moran had published at least one known wood engraving under her own name, confirming that she was skilled in the medium. Attributed to “Mrs. T. Moran” and signed “M. Moran,” the engraving was included in a volume of poetic verse titled *Illustrated Library of Favorite Song: Based Upon Folk Songs, and Comprising Songs of the Heart, Songs of Home, Songs of Life, and Songs of Nature*. Sold by subscription, the publication included 125 wood engravings after the designs of well-known artists, including Moran, R. Swain Gifford, Mary Hallock (later Mary Hallock Foote), James D. Smillie, and Harry Fenn. Nimmo Moran contributed a landscape (figure 2.29) to accompany John Hamilton Reynolds’ song of the heart titled “Think of Me,” the first verse of which reads: “Go where the water glideth gently ever / Glideth through meadows that the greenest be / Go, listen to our own beloved river / And think of me.”

A visualization of Reynolds’ poem, Nimmo Moran’s landscape depicts a forest scene with three large oak trees lining the near shore of “our own beloved river.” Outstretched branches lead the viewer’s eye over the river, the surface of which shimmers brightly and reflects the lush foliage of distant trees. The intimacy of the scene and the viewer’s closeness to nature is enhanced by the circular format of the vignette, the bottom edge of which extends beyond the perimeter of the circle spilling onto the page to enhance the three-dimensionality of the image.

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64 Ibid., 248-249.
65 Although Nimmo Moran drew the image, she did not engrave the woodblock. This was done by J. Augustus Bogert (American, active 1850-1881), a skilled wood engraver who also contributed works to *Picturesque America* and *The Aldine*.
Her attention to natural detail is especially evident in this foregrounded area, as each leaf and blade of grass is carefully observed and rendered with deliberate individuality. The circular vignette is also suggestive of an open window through which the reader can observe the natural world. Both a threshold and barrier to nature, the open window was a popular Romantic motif often portrayed by artists to illustrate themes of longing, a lust for travel, and a love of nature.67 By evoking an open window, Nimmo Moran poetically conveys the sentimental yearning expressed in Reynolds’ verse.

Approximately half of the engravings in the *Illustrated Library of Favorite Song* are landscapes. Appealing to the pastime of armchair travel, landscape views were among the most popular genres featured in illustrated books and magazines. Periodicals such as *Scribner’s*, *Appleton’s*, and *Harper’s* lured readers with abundant landscape illustrations; however, it was arguably *The Aldine* – a monthly magazine published between 1868 and 1879 – that led the industry in this field. Founded as a “Typographical Art Journal,” the magazine rebranded itself in 1874 as “The Art Journal of America,” dedicated to producing the highest quality wood engravings after works by eminent American and European artists.68 The magazine frequently devoted a full page of its eleven-by-sixteen-inch folio to a single illustration, which was printed on high-quality paper using the most up-to-date reproduction technology.

In addition to the wood engravings Nimmo Moran may have collaborated on with her husband, she published two additional landscapes in *The Aldine*. The first titled *Isles of the Amazons* (figure 2.30) was published in 1877 under a pseudonym; as the accompanying article explains: “The painter of this charming tropical scene…hides her identity under the pseudonym

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of ‘Mary Nemo.’ She is known, however, to an increasing circle of admirers of her work, as the wife of an artist of growing reputation, and to whose brush the readers of The Aldine have been often indebted for beautiful scenery.” Although she had previously exhibited works under the Moran name, she may have hoped to differentiate her work from her husband’s, as well as the other artists of the Moran family, by adopting a misspelling of her maiden name. However, this is the only known instance in which the artist used this (or any) pseudonym and she subsequently settled on “M. Nimmo Moran” as her professional name, perhaps realizing the benefit of associating herself with the widely respected Moran family.

In addition to the nearly identical pronunciation of “Mary Nemo” and “Mary Nimmo,” as well as the author’s “hint” that she was the wife of a well-known artist and frequent contributor to The Aldine (i.e. Thomas Moran), this illustration can be connected to Nimmo Moran through another source. In 1871, Thomas Moran’s older brother John Moran, a landscape photographer living in Philadelphia, accompanied the U.S. Naval Expedition to the Isthmus of Darien (present-day Panama). Comparing John Moran’s survey photographs to Mary Nimmo Moran’s Isles of the Amazons reveals striking compositional similarities, indicating that she composed the illustration using his photographs as visual aids. The natural archway located at the center of her composition bears direct resemblance to Moran’s Tropical Scenery, Natural Arch, Cupica Bay (figure 2.31). She lifted the natural archway from this photograph of Cupica Bay, inserting it into a larger landscape scene where it functions as a vanishing point.

69 “Isles of the Amazons,” The Aldine 8, no. 7 (1877): 223. Between 1872 and 1879, Thomas Moran supplied The Aldine with thirty-nine illustrations that were featured in five of the magazine’s nine volumes. Kinsey, Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West, 86-87.
70 John Moran was a prominent photographer, producing a large number of stereographic views and individual albumen prints. He was an early advocate for the advancement of photography as a fine art, disputing the medium’s association with science and the mechanical arts. For a discussion of his early work, consisting primarily of landscapes and architectural views taken in Philadelphia and its surrounding forests between 1860 and 1870, see Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., “The Early Work of John Moran, Landscape Photographer,” American Art Journal 11, no. 1 (January 1979): 65-75. Institutional holdings of Moran’s Darien Expedition photographs include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Public Library, George Eastman House, and Library of Congress.
In the foreground of the illustration, Nimmo Moran depicted a wide array of tropical vegetation, including several palm trees, two of which arc over the water to create another natural archway in the landscape. John Moran executed several photographic studies of vegetation in the region, including close-up views of lush forest interiors that feature palm fronds and palm trees (figure 2.32-2.33). Although Nimmo Moran’s illustration does not correspond to any one photograph taken by Moran, the degree of detail and variety of foliage suggests that she had carefully studied his work. As The Aldine noted, her illustration “though not a landscape portrait, is not a fanciful sketch, but a composition from careful studies.”\(^71\) By compiling and manipulating several views into one picturesque composition, Nimmo Moran produced a “charming tropical scene,” one that The Aldine admired for its “firm handling…excellent management of light and shade, and the careful integrity with which the work…is done.”\(^72\)

Her composite approach reflects the influence of Thomas Moran, who is known to have worked from a variety of sources, including photographs, contour drawings, and watercolors, often compiling several views and vantage points into a finished picture. On at least one occasion, he wrote to his wife about the usefulness of photography as an artistic aid: “I made an outline and did a little color work but had not time nor was it worth while to make a detailed study in color. We [Moran and Jack Hillers] made several photos which will give me all the details I want if I conclude to paint the view.”\(^73\) Neither Moran nor Nimmo Moran directly transcribed photographic views into paintings or illustrations, but instead used them as guides to create original works of art, what Moran called his “impressions.”\(^74\) As Kinsey has noted, his finished works, although faithful in their individual parts, were in fact compositions of Moran’s

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\(^71\) “Isles of the Amazons,” 223.
\(^72\) Ibid.
\(^73\) Thomas Moran, letter to Mary Nimmo Moran, Kanab, Utah, August 13, 1873, reprinted in Bassford, 40.
own making. This analysis can be extended to Nimmo Moran’s illustration, which despite the topographical accuracy of its parts was a scene of the artist’s imagination.

In addition to *Isles of the Amazons*, she drew a second view of Cupica Bay on a woodblock that was never carved (figure 2.34). The curvilinear pencil marks in the upper corners of the block are consistent with the beveled border of *Isles of the Amazons*, suggesting that it was produced for the same commission. As in the published wood engraving, the composition is based on John Moran’s survey photographs and the artist synthesized a number of views into a unified whole. Moran photographed the small islands featured in Nimmo Moran’s drawing on at least three occasions, documenting them from various angles and at different times of day (figures 2.35-2.37). In one stereoscopic view (figure 2.37), Moran photographed a figure on the beach carrying a barrel over his shoulder. Nimmo Moran erased this figure and signs of his labor from her image, yet she included a barrel and a piece of driftwood on the shore – symbols of the human presence in an otherwise uninhabited landscape. On the horizon, she replaced the naval ship featured in Moran’s stereoscope with a small sailboat, a pictorial manipulation that enhances the picturesque quality of the scene.

When selecting an image for publication, *The Aldine* may have preferred *Isles of the Amazons* to *Cupica Bay*, as the former image conformed to the well-established iconography of the tropics. Nimmo Moran’s emphasis on the fecundity of the landscape and her inclusion of the palm – both trees and fronds – would have immediately identified the scene as tropical “other” in the minds and eyes of *The Aldine* readers. Art historian Katherine Manthorne has noted that, “the stately palm became a *genius loci* of these southern regions; its nearly ubiquitous presence in the

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75 Rodman Gilder, son of Richard Watson and Helena de Kay Gilder, gifted this woodblock to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1953. This may indicate that the image was intended for publication in *Scribner’s*, where Richard Watson Gilder worked as managing editor, rather than in *The Aldine*. 

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painted and verbal imagery indicated transport to the torrid zone.” Moreover, the Latin American landscape – with its palm trees and abundant vegetation – was associated with the Garden of Eden and the origins of life. Nimmo Moran’s fertile landscape of tangled vines, dense flowering plants, and plentiful palm trees reinforced a vision of Latin America as Paradise.

However, her illustration was published at a moment when artists and critics began to question the idealization of the tropics, as many of the Edenic myths about the region were proven false. Yet even as disillusionment spread, many artists continued to envision the landscape as an untouched Paradise. The connection between *Isles of the Amazons* and Eden was made explicit by *The Aldine*, which reproduced the following quotation from Tennyson’s “Lockley Hall” (1842) below the illustration: “Droops the heavy-blossomed bower, hands the heavy-fruited tree – Summer isles of Eden lying in park-purple sphere of sea.”

*The Aldine* did not identify the geographic location of the illustration or note any connection to the Darien Expedition. Instead, the author relates the landscape to literature, quoting this time from Tennyson’s narrative poem “Enoch Arden” (1864). As s/he asserts, readers need not stretch their imagination too far to “conceive this to be the very island” upon which Tennyson’s shipwrecked protagonist Enoch Arden was stranded. Tennyson’s description of the island accompanied “Mary Nemo’s” illustration, which embodied all the “sensuous beauty” and “wanton luxuriousness” of the faraway tropics.

In 1879, *The Aldine* published a second illustration by Nimmo Moran of the Latin American landscape. Titled *A Scene in the Tropics* (figure 2.38), the wood engraving bears a

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77 Ibid., 381.
79 “Isles of the Amazons,” 223.
compositional resemblance to John Moran’s photographs of the Limon River and Napipi Trail (figures 2.39-2.40). Despite the lush vegetation and profuse fertility of the land, the accompanying article does not associate this image with Eden – as it had with *Isles of the Amazons* two years prior. Instead, the author identifies the location of the scene, noting that, “this study was suggested by a view on the Panama Railway, while crossing the Isthmus of Darien.”

When publishing this illustration in 1879, the artist abandoned her pseudonym and the work is attributed to “the pencil of Mrs. Thomas Moran, a professional artist who does excellent work, although totally unlike that produced by her eminent husband.” The image is described as “typical of the rank vegetation of the tropics, where cocoa palms, vines, trees, and flowers of all kinds grow in rich and inextricable profusion.” In fact, the vegetation is so rich and profuse that it cannot be contained within the vignette: as if unable to tame or control the landscape, the artist extended the foreground flora beyond the lower edge of the circle, a technique she used in her wood engraved illustration for the *Illustrated Library of Favorite Song* (figure 2.29). Despite the author’s description of this scene as “typical,” it is unlike Nimmo Moran’s earlier depictions of the Latin American landscape in which both light and sky are visible and signs of human life are present, albeit only minimally. In contrast, this dense, overgrown, and seemingly uninhabitable scene creates an air of mystery and obscurity, as the viewer is unable to see beyond the dark depths of the impenetrable landscape.

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81 Ibid. This statement led Wilkins to conclude that the Morans had traveled to Panama on their way home from Yosemite Valley in 1872. Yet given the dates of their trip, which Moran recorded in his journal as August 24 to October 5, 1872, it is doubtful they had the time to visit Central America. In light of the compositional similarities between Nimmo Moran’s illustrations and John Moran’s photographs, it is far more likely that she was simply working from his photographic models and did not visit the Isthmus of Darien. Wilkins, 114.
82 “A Scene in the Tropics,” 265.
83 This approach to the landscape reflects new attitudes toward Latin America, as the myth of tropical Paradise began to unravel. For more information about these changing attitudes and the affect it had on the work of American artists such as Frederic Church, see Manthorne, “The Quest for a Tropical Paradise,” 381.
Although Nimmo Moran did not travel to the Amazon or the Isthmus of Darien, The Aldine acknowledged that she was “a great traveler as well as painter, and has visited all parts of the West and California with her husband.” However, it was not her western travels that informed her knowledge of the tropical landscape. In February 1877, she and Thomas Moran traveled to Fort George Island off the northeastern coast of Florida. Moran was working on a commission from Scribner’s to produce a series of wood engraved illustrations that would accompany Julia E. Dodge’s article “An Island in the Sea.”

By the mid-1870s, Florida boasted a thriving tourist industry with an estimated 50,000 visitors traveling to the state each year. Yet, as Dodge noted, “Of the throngs of tourists who every winter pass this island [Fort George] in their search for health or pleasure in the land of Ponce de Leon, comparatively few even know of its existence.” In an effort to direct tourism to Fort George, she praised the natural beauty and restorative qualities of this “hidden gem,” noting that, “it would be hard to find a spot combining more advantages and delights than this.” She described in detail both the history and scenery of the island, where “nature has been very bountiful” covering its surface with “about forty kinds of trees.” Most notable, according to Dodge, is the “stately tropical palm…found here in an abundance unknown to southern Florida, – which, in its various forms and stages of growth, gives to the scenery its peculiarly tropical appearance.” From cabbage palms to scrub palmettos, Dodge chronicled the island’s lush

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84 "A Scene in the Tropics,” 265.
87 Dodge, 652.
88 Ibid., 652-653.
89 Ibid., 655.
90 Ibid., 655-656.
vegetation, comparing it to “far-off tropical jungles” with views that “might be placed in South America with scarcely a change.”

Departing from New York on February 11, 1877, the Morans traveled aboard the San Jacinto steamship to Savannah, Georgia. From Savannah, they traveled by train to Jacksonville, described by writer Edward King as “the chief city of Florida, and the rendezvous for all travelers who intend to penetrate to the interior of the beautiful peninsula.” In Jacksonville, Moran executed the first of thirty-three known studies, including twenty-nine pencil drawings and four watercolors, which he completed over the course of their two-week journey. A particularly prolific sketching period for the artist, he was inspired by the abundant foliage and profuse vegetation of Florida’s tropical landscape, which offered a striking contrast to the mountainous terrain of the American West. Only three of Nimmo Moran’s pencil sketches from this trip have been located, although she likely executed additional works.

Nimmo Moran’s earliest study (figure 2.41) dates to February 19, 1877 and depicts the scenery around the Villa Alexandria in Jacksonville, Florida. The winter home of Milwaukee Railroad mogul Alexander Mitchell and his wife, prominent art collector Martha Reed Mitchell, the Villa Alexandria was built in the 1870s and occupied 140 acres of land on the banks of the

91 Dodge, 656 and 658.
94 For a complete list of Thomas Moran’s Floridian studies, see cat. nos. 305-337 in Morand, Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 158-165.
95 Additionally, two of Mary Nimmo Moran’s earliest etchings depict Florida’s landscape, including her very first etching The St. John’s River (1879, figure 4.3) and Evening on the St. John’s River, Florida (1882, figure 5.32), the compositions of which may have been based on the sketches she executed on this trip to Florida in 1877.
St. Johns River. The Morans were guests of the Mitchells, whom they met the summer prior when traveling to Madison, Wisconsin.  

In Nimmo Moran’s first pencil sketch of the Villa Alexandria (figure 2.41), she did not feature the Mitchells’ palatial residence, but instead depicted a winding path lined with a variety of vegetation, including live oaks with hanging Spanish moss on the left, scrub palms on the right, and cabbage palms in the distance.  

Morand has noted that the curving road, which begins in the foreground and disappears in the middle ground, was a frequent motif adopted by Thomas Moran in many of his eastern landscapes, including approximately one-third of the studies he executed in Florida in 1877.  

A classic compositional device that leads the viewer’s eye from the foreground to the distance, the winding road is also seen in several of Nimmo Moran’s sketches and etchings – five of which depict the landscape of Florida’s eastern coast.  

The prevalence of this compositional device in the Morans’ Floridian works was in response to a distinctive feature of the southern topography known as the oyster shell road. Dodge described these roads noting that, “miles of avenues have been cut with fine taste and discrimination in all directions through the woods, and connected with the drive upon the beach; a part of them are covered with the quickly crumbling oyster shells, making the splendid ‘shell road’ so famous in the south.”  

As a result, the oyster shell road, along with the palm tree, was

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96 Thomas Moran was commissioned by the Women’s Centennial Committee of Wisconsin to paint two pictures to represent the state at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. Martha Reed Mitchell purchased one of Moran’s paintings from the exhibition, although both were destroyed in a fire at the University of Wisconsin in 1884. Mitchell acquired a number of Moran’s paintings throughout his career. She was also a strong supporter of women artists and although there is no known documentation confirming that she owned works by Nimmo Moran, it is certainly likely. On Mitchell’s collecting history, see Katherine Manthorne, “Eliza Greatorex and Her Art Sisterhood in the Collection of Martha Reed Mitchell, 1863-1877,” Women’s Studies 39, no. 6 (2010): 518-535 and Katherine Manthorne, “Martha Reed Mitchell: Early Champion of Women Artists,” Fine Art Connoisseur (March/April 2010): 57-61.  

97 There are black and green watercolor brushstrokes in the bottom right corner of this drawing, indicating that she may have also executed watercolors on this trip, although examples have not yet been located.  

98 Morand, Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 45.  

99 Nimmo Moran’s Floridian etchings are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Four and Six.  

100 Dodge, 655.
a frequent motif in the Morans’ southern landscapes, adopted to convey the topographic character of the region.

After arriving in Jacksonville, the Morans traveled south along the St. Johns River. Their journey can be traced through three studies, the first of which was executed by Thomas Moran on February 22, 1877 in St. Augustine, approximately forty miles southeast of Jacksonville.\footnote{Cat. no. 306 in Morand, \textit{Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches}, 158-159.} Traveling by horse-drawn railway and boat, the couple continued south, first to Palatka, where Nimmo Moran drew live oaks and Spanish moss on the banks of the St. Johns River (figure 2.42), and then to Silver Springs, where she drew another view of the river framed by oak and palm trees (figure 2.43). Both works are dated February 22, 1877, and appear to have been executed rather quickly, as she rapidly recorded the vegetation of the riverbank and left several motifs unfinished.

In their southern detour to St. Augustine, Palatka, and Silver Springs, the Morans were following in the footsteps of Edward King, who had published an account of a similar journey along the St. Johns River first in \textit{Scribner’s} and later in his travel memoir \textit{The Great South}.\footnote{Edward King’s “The Great South” was published in several installments in \textit{Scribner’s} between 1873 and 1875. The series was then published as a book in 1875. For King’s description of Florida, see Edward King, “The Great South,” \textit{Scribner’s Monthly} 9, no. 1 (November 1874): 1-31 and King, \textit{The Great South}, 377-421.} Moran, working from the drawings of artist J. Wells Champney, had provided more than fifty illustrations for King’s publication, which may have instilled in him a desire to see the picturesque towns and tropical locales described by the author. By March 1, 1877, the Morans had made their way back to northern Florida, taking the Water Lily steamship from Jacksonville to Fort George Island, where they stayed for the remainder of their trip.\footnote{Dodge, 653.}

After drawing several scenes of Fort George Island – including panoramic views of the St. Johns River, studies of local flora, and sketches of island architecture, notably abandoned
slave quarters and a haunted “ghost house” – the Morans returned to Newark in order to translate this “raw material” into finished illustrations. Six wood engravings eventually accompanied Dodge’s article, five of which are attributed to Thomas Moran and bear the artist’s monogram, composed of an overlapping “T” and “M.” Nimmo Moran may have assisted her husband with the illustrations that were then published under his name.

The experience of studying Florida’s vegetation had a lasting influence on Nimmo Moran. The trip provided her with a firsthand knowledge of exotic flora and tropical palms, which in addition to John Moran’s photographs inspired her illustrations in *The Aldine*. Her time in Florida offered an opportunity to cultivate her proficiency in *plein-air* drawing, a practice she refined over the course of her career. Exhibition records also reveal that she painted at least two Floridian watercolors, *On the Oclawaha, Florida* and *On the St. John’s River, Florida*, both of which were exhibited in the Louisville Industrial Exposition of 1879.

Although etching was her preferred medium of expression after 1879, Nimmo Moran executed at least one additional wood engraving for publication in the 1880s. Titled *The River Above the Whirlpool* (figure 2.44), the illustration accompanies Louise Murray’s essay on “The Niagara District” published in *Picturesque Canada*. The wood engraving is based on a graphite-and-wash drawing executed by the artist on June 30, 1881 (figure 2.45). An inscription on the drawing identifies the site as “Colt’s Wheel Elevator at the Whirlpool / Canada Side,” a reference to the incline railway built by Leander Colt on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. 

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104 The sixth illustration titled “The Bar and the Pelicans, Fort George Island” is signed with the initials “R.V.”


107 Built in 1869, Colt’s design was comprised of a continuous belt of metal buckets that collected water from a river below to turn a wheel powering the railway cars as they descended to the banks of the Niagara Whirlpool. In the 1870s and 1880s, the incline railway was a popular tourist destination; however, it was abandoned in 1889 after it was severely damaged in a landslide.
The Morans were commissioned to produce a series of Canadian landscapes for reproduction in *Picturesque Canada*. Conceived of by Americans Howard and Reuben Belden, the publication was modeled after Appleton’s widely successful *Picturesque America*. The Belden brothers promoted *Picturesque Canada* as a thoroughly Canadian enterprise; yet, as art historian Allan Pringle has demonstrated, the “Canadianness” of their operation was a ruse, as American artists provided more than eighty percent of the illustrations.\(^{108}\) Both Moran and Nimmo Moran contributed illustrations to Murray’s “The Niagara District,” which was considered by many to be the most important and prestigious essay in the volume.

Niagara Falls is a symbol of national significance to both Americans and Canadians. Artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Church immortalized the sublimity of this iconic natural wonder in paintings such as Cole’s *Distant View of Niagara Falls* (1830, Art Institute of Chicago) and Church’s *Niagara* (1857, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), both of which convey the extraordinary power and prestige of the North American landscape.\(^{109}\) Yet, as Pringle notes, by the 1880s American interest in Niagara Falls waned, as artists turned their attention to the landscape of the American West.\(^{110}\) For Canadian audiences, however, Niagara Falls remained a prominent national treasure and the Canadian side was believed to be, as Murray writes, “the finest half of the cataract…it is only from the Canada side that the soft ethereal veils of vapour [sic], which give such mystic beauty to the Falls, and the flitting, changeful rainbows, which throw over them such a halo of glory, can be seen in perfection.”\(^{111}\) Despite the importance of the falls to the formation of Canadian national identity, it was


\(^{109}\) Church’s *Niagara* was displayed in the American section of the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, where it attracted considerable interest and attention. The Morans, who were studying in Paris at the time, undoubtedly saw the painting at the Exposition.

\(^{110}\) Pringle, 21, n. 37.

\(^{111}\) Murray, 353.
American artists Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran who were commissioned to convey the beauty and significance of this natural wonder to readers of *Picturesque Canada*.

Moran’s journal indicates that the couple visited Niagara Falls between June 13 and June 30, 1881. Nimmo Moran’s *Colt’s Wheel Elevator, Canada Side, at the Whirlpool* (figure 2.45) is the artist’s only extant drawing from the trip. Unlike her husband’s sketches, which depict the turbulent rapids, rushing water, and misting cataracts, Nimmo Moran focused her attention on a man-made apparatus and popular tourist attraction in the landscape. Framed on the left by a precariously perched tree and set against the backdrop of the Niagara River winding its way through the canyon below, Colt’s railway fits seamlessly into the landscape. In both the wash drawing and wood engraving, the revolving belt of metal buckets fades and becomes nearly indistinct at the lower edge of the image, which is engulfed in the misting water of the unseen river below.

The quiet stillness that pervades Nimmo Moran’s illustration contrasts with Moran’s sublime depictions of the region, as evidenced when comparing her landscape to Moran’s *Ravine Near Whirlpool* (figure 2.46). In latter work, the viewer is positioned at the bottom of the ravine with the rushing water of the falls rapidly approaching. Colt’s incline railway is visible on the distant left, but it is of little interest to the viewer, who is preoccupied by the danger of an imminent flood in the foreground. In contrast, Nimmo Moran’s wash drawing and wood engraving provide a behind-the-scenes look at the mechanism of the incline railway, highlighting the ways in which humans have harnessed the power of nature for their own amusement.

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112 Pringle, 18.
113 For reproductions of Moran’s Niagara sketches, see cat. nos. 537-539 in Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches*, 200-201.
Paintings and Public Exhibitions

In addition to the *plein-air* pencil studies, wash drawings, watercolors, and wood engravings that Nimmo Moran produced in the 1870s, she also executed and exhibited several oil paintings. In 1869, she made her professional debut at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where she exhibited a landscape painting titled *A Wood Scene*. This same year, artist Eliza Greatorex (American, 1819-1897) was elected Associate of the National Academy of Design – the first living female artist awarded such an honor. Greatorex’s recognition and success may have encouraged Nimmo Moran’s pursuit of a professional career and over the course of the next two decades both women executed important paintings and prints.

The location of Nimmo Moran’s *A Wood Scene* remains unknown, but a pencil sketch completed by the artist later that year may reveal something of the compositional and stylistic appearance of the painting (figure 2.47). Signed “M. Moran” and dated “Oct. 12 1869,” it is her earliest extant work and depicts a forest interior. In the middle ground, a small waterfall meets a stream flanked on either side by trees that create a natural arch in the composition. The viewer stands on the stream’s near shore and although no figures are visible, she alludes to man’s presence in nature by including a small stone wall on the right and a house on the left. The density of the forest is conveyed through vertical pencil shading, executed quickly as a shorthand notation for overgrown foliage. In the distance, a group of tall, thin trees obstructs our view to the horizon, emphasizing the interiority and intimacy of the scene.

The sketch was most likely executed on the spot in a Pennsylvania forest, where she and Moran often drew out of doors, gathering “raw material” for their finished compositions. Several

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of Moran’s works from the 1860s depict the Pennsylvania landscape, which he and Nimmo Moran could easily access from their home in Philadelphia. Similar to her husband’s paintings from this period, she paid close attention to the variety of natural forms, rendering trees, leaves, rocks, and individual blades of grass with equal consideration – putting into practice the lessons of Ruskin. Her interest in the forest interior also reflects the influence of the Barbizon School, whose works she studied firsthand in Paris.

Exhibition records indicate that after making her debut at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1869, she did not publicly exhibit another oil painting until 1877. It is important to note that between 1870 and 1875, the Academy’s annual exhibitions were suspended while its new headquarters were under construction in Philadelphia. The Morans, however, had moved to Newark, New Jersey, in 1871 and New York’s National Academy of Design would have been a closer and more practical exhibition venue. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, domestic duties may have interfered with her art making, as she found it increasingly difficult to dedicate the time necessary for executing oil paintings. Moreover, she may have prioritized illustration commissions since such work provided steady income.

Nevertheless, in 1877, Nimmo Moran publicly exhibited her first oil painting in seven years. She likely executed paintings between 1869 and 1877 – works that were either never submitted for exhibition or were rejected by the Academy’s jury. Unfortunately, she did not keep records of her paintings, much to the frustration of daughter Ruth Moran who later wrote that her mother “kept no record of these canvases and how many there were, or who bought them is not

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116 Falk and Rutledge, v. 1, x-xi.
117 Thomas Moran made his debut at the National Academy of Design in 1866 and contributed paintings to the Academy’s annual exhibitions throughout the 1870s, earning his election as Academician in 1884. For Moran’s complete exhibition history at the National Academy of Design, see Naylor, 653-656.
known.” As a result, exhibition catalogues provide the most detailed information pertaining to her production during these years, although these records do not necessarily provide a complete inventory of her painted oeuvre.

She made her debut at the National Academy of Design in 1877, exhibiting a work titled *Autumnal Twilight* that was listed for sale at $150.\textsuperscript{119} The following year, she exhibited an oil painting titled *Evening* at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{120} The locations of these two paintings are currently unknown and given the similarity of their titles they may in fact be the same work. At the very least, each title reveals the artist’s interest in capturing seasonal changes and specific times of day, notably twilight and evening, which evoke poetic moods through pronounced contrasts of light and dark.

In her earliest surviving painting *Newark from the Meadows* (figure 2.48), the shifting effect of light on the landscape is of primary importance. Completed in 1879, this oil on panel painting measures eight and a half inches high by sixteen inches wide. The work’s small size combined with her loose paint handling suggests that it was executed *en plein air*. In the foreground, she presents a panoramic view of the Newark meadowlands, sketchily painted in shades of green and yellow with bold accents of red and orange paint. A small body of water, lined on each side by the meadow’s rising reeds, reflects a ray of sunlight that sneaks through an opening in the band of dark clouds passing overhead. Quickly executed in shades of white, blue, and gray paint, these clouds cast long, ominous shadows over the landscape enveloping a group of trees on the left in darkness.

\textsuperscript{119} Naylor, 656.
\textsuperscript{120} Falk and Rutledge, v. 2, 341.
Newark’s urban skyline is brilliantly illuminated in the middle ground of the composition. Although sketchily rendered, several buildings are discernible, including churches with steeples that create vertical markers in an otherwise horizontal landscape. Yet the most prominent feature of the city is the smokestack: Nimmo Moran painted three smoldering chimneys that emit dark smoke rising above the distant hills and billowing across the horizon. This detail emphasizes the industrial character of Newark – a city in which nature and industry, meadowlands and factories, are juxtaposed. Art historian Matthew Baigell has described the work as “unusual in that it is one of the earliest depictions of the industrial scene in America.”¹²¹

Despite the painting’s modest size, Nimmo Moran considered the work to be of particular importance and she exhibited it on four known occasions between 1879 and 1881. After debuting the painting at the National Academy of Design in spring 1879, she exhibited it that fall in the Louisville Industrial Exposition.¹²² It was then displayed in the 1880 annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, before heading west for inclusion in the Industrial Exposition of Milwaukee in 1881.¹²³ Following European precedents, industrial expositions were organized across the United States to encourage mechanical innovation and technological progress, offering manufacturers, inventors, artisans, and artists an opportunity to display and sell their latest works and wares. The nation’s first industrial exposition was held in New York City in 1828, but as the country expanded geographically and economically over the course of the nineteenth century, emerging manufacturing cities, notably in the Midwest and the South, hosted annual fairs to assert their contributions to America’s industrial development.

¹²² Naylor, 656 and cat. no. 128 in Louisville Industrial Exposition: Catalogue of Paintings and Statuary (Louisville: Courier-Journal Book and Job Printing Rooms, 1879), 25. In addition to Newark from the Meadows, Nimmo Moran exhibited two watercolors at the Louisville Industrial Exposition: On the Oclawaha, Florida and On the St. John’s River, Florida, each listed for sale at $30. There is no record of the artist exhibiting either watercolor again during her lifetime, which may indicate that the works sold from the Exposition.
At these various expositions, industry and technology were celebrated as symbols of American modernity and progress, and it is important to consider Nimmo Moran’s *Newark from the Meadows* within this context. Audiences at the industrial expositions in Louisville and Milwaukee could interpret her depiction of Newark – bathed in natural light and alive with industrial activity – as a beacon of commercial progress and economic potential, symbolic of development rather than decay. However, for urban audiences viewing the painting in the art academies of New York or Philadelphia, her unusual depiction of an industrial scene may have been an unwelcomed reminder of the nation’s changing complexion. East Coast collectors, many of whom were businessmen, captains of industry, and manufacturing tycoons, generally preferred picturesque views of American wilderness – landscapes that nostalgically preserve the nation’s preindustrial past.

By exhibiting this painting in the Midwest, she may have hoped to find an enthusiastic collector in one of the nation’s new manufacturing hubs. However, the painting did not sell in either Louisville or Milwaukee and the difficulty she faced finding a buyer may reflect the work’s unusual subject matter. Her depiction of the industrial landscape – although a popular theme with American artists in the early twentieth century – was uncommon for the period. As a result, modern scholars have had some difficulty interpreting and contextualizing this small but important landscape. Art historian Peter Bermingham argues that the work “presents a curiously ambivalent attitude towards the city, which is bathed in a glorious light but seems to be both threat and promise amidst the untrammeled nature that surrounds it.”

In contrast, curator Holly Connor contends that, “the artist’s major focus…is the surrounding countryside. She places the

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city in the middle distance where it appears harmoniously enveloped in the landscape and thereby mutes the scene’s industrial aspects.”

To better understand Nimmo Moran’s attitudes toward industry and nature – notably the encroachment of the former upon the latter – one must analyze *Newark from the Meadows* within her larger oeuvre of drawings, paintings, and prints. Her fieldwork over the course of the 1870s indicates her interest in the juxtaposition of man and nature, industry and landscape. For instance, when visiting Mauch Chunk in 1873, she drew trees, mountains, and rivers, as well as railroads, freight trains, cargo ships, and cast iron bridges, and her 1881 illustration *The River Above the Whirlpool* similarly focuses on modern technological innovation. The Moran family’s move to Newark – a rapidly developing industrial center, but one that was adjacent to vast areas of unspoiled nature – offered the artist an opportunity to explore her varied interests.

Nimmo Moran may have pursued industrial subject matter to distinguish her art from Moran’s. As noted, he overwhelmingly favored scenes of unspoiled nature, often intentionally leaving out signs of modern industry in the landscape. Yet in 1880, one year after Nimmo Moran painted *Newark from the Meadows*, he turned his attention rather uncharacteristically to drawing scenes of industrial life in New Jersey. The following year, he completed *Lower Manhattan from Communipaw, New Jersey* (1881, figure 2.49), a work that dramatically contrasts with his earlier (and later) depictions of the American landscape.

In Moran’s painting, the viewer stands on the shores of Communipaw’s industrial harbor, framed on either side by the sugar refineries of New Jersey’s waterfront. Across the Hudson River, which cuts through the middle ground of the composition, the skyline of lower Manhattan

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126 Nimmo Moran also etched an industrial view of Newark (figure 4.22), which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.
is bathed in brilliant natural light. There are interesting compositional similarities between the Morans’ paintings: as in Nimmo Moran’s *Newark from the Meadows*, Moran symbolically illuminates the urban environment, which is presented at a considerable distance from the viewer. Both artists foreground nature, a compositional strategy that creates what Morand describes as a “psychological barrier…one observes but is separated from the industrial activity.”

Moran was likely inspired by his wife’s interest in juxtaposing natural and urban environments, the past with the present, and he pursued (albeit for a limited time) the pictorial possibilities of the industrial scene.

It would be inaccurate to present Nimmo Moran as an artist solely interested in the industrial landscape, since after 1881 she is not known to have drawn, painted, or etched another urban scene. This may reflect the limited market for industrial paintings and her thwarted attempts to sell *Newark from the Meadows*. As a result, she turned her attention to painting and etching nature in its pure, unspoiled state. This was not an entirely new direction for the artist since examples of her *plein-air* studies, watercolors, and illustrations represent nature untouched by modern industry.

She adopted this approach when painting *East Hampton, Long Island* (figure 2.50) – a work in oil on panel measuring nearly two times the size of *Newark from the Meadows*. She exhibited the painting first at the National Academy of Design in spring 1880, before sending it to the Louisville Industrial Exposition in the fall. The work was listed for sale at both venues for $250 – the highest asking price for one of her works during her lifetime. Classically composed, *East Hampton, Long Island* is a picturesque scene of Long Island’s East End, where

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130 *East Hampton, Long Island* was the first painting by Mary Nimmo Moran to appear at auction. In June 2011, it sold at Swann Auction Galleries, New York, for $64,800 (sale 2250, lot 82).
the Morans first summered in 1878. The viewer enters the landscape on a sandy path, which slowly winds its way through the composition, leading our eye to the horizon where a man on horseback corals cattle. The scene is framed on the left by a group of trees painted in shades of green, brown, and red, a subtle indication of seasonal changes marking the end of summer and the beginning of fall.

Two windmills are visible on the horizon with their sails silhouetted against the sky. For New York audiences, the windmills help to identify the painting’s location as eastern Long Island and specifically as East Hampton. The town was well known for its historic windmills, which were described by author Oliver Bell Bunce in *Picturesque America* as “reminding one forcibly of the quaint old mills in Holland which artists have always delighted to paint. They form a distinctive feature of this part of the island, inasmuch as there are few similar structures existing anywhere in our country.”

The illustrations that accompany Bunce’s article feature East Hampton’s windmills, closely associating the structure with the town.

In addition to identifying the painting’s locale as East Hampton, the windmills enhance the picturesque quality of Nimmo Moran’s scene. An emblem of America’s agrarian beginnings, the windmill symbolized the nation’s pastoral past, evoking both the town’s history and the country’s rural origins. As a result, *East Hampton, Long Island* can be interpreted as a pictorial antidote to *Newark from the Meadows*: although both works foreground nature over labor, the former highlights the past (the windmill), while the latter illuminates the future (the smokestack). Interestingly, representing the past would become the artist’s future, as she left depictions of modern industry behind her.

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132 See Harry Fenn’s illustrations *East Hampton, from the Church Belfry and Grist Wind-Mills at East Hampton* in Ibid., 253 and 257, respectively.
In 1881, Nimmo Moran exhibited two oil paintings *Summer Day* and *The Rivulet*, at the National Academy of Design, as well as two watercolors *On the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.* and *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.*, in the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society. Yet after 1881, she did not publicly exhibit another oil or watercolor painting until 1896, when her *Spring Blossoms* (possibly figure 6.26 or 6.29) hung in the National Academy of Design. In the fifteen-year interim, she emerged as a preeminent printmaker, devoting her artistic production almost entirely to etching.

Throughout the 1870s, Nimmo Moran demonstrated a dedication to art making, traveling whenever possible to study and sketch the American landscape – from Newark and Easton to Yosemite and Jacksonville. She produced works in a variety of media, experimenting with different modes of expression before pursuing etching in 1879. In terms of quantity, her oeuvre in the 1870s was limited, especially when compared to Moran’s incredible, “almost superhuman…productiveness,” as Ruth Moran described it. Yet one must consider her output within the context of her role as wife and mother, housekeeper and caretaker, business manager and social coordinator, assistant and critic, pupil and teacher. Navigating this overwhelming array of familial, domestic, and professional duties did not deter her from pursuing her artistic aspirations, although it undoubtedly slowed her development and limited her production. Drawing on the training she acquired in the 1860s, she continued to improve her aesthetic abilities and knowledge of nature, building the foundation upon which she established her success as a leading American painter-etcher in the 1880s.

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134 Naylor, 656.
CHAPTER 3:  
ORIGINAL PRINTMAKING AND THE RISE OF THE ETCHING “REVIVAL”  
IN MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE, ENGLAND, AND THE UNITED STATES

The marvelous spread and influence of the art of etching in America is without parallel. Receiving its first strength of life less than twenty years ago, it has in the time intervening done more in our country to educate the people to a higher appreciation of the beautiful in all arts than any other branch of the fine arts. – Henry Russell Wray, *A Review of Etching in the United States* (1893)

In the summer 1879, Mary Nimmo Moran traveled once again to Easton, Pennsylvania. Six years earlier, when she sketched the town and the surrounding landscape of the Lehigh Valley, she worked primarily in graphite on paper, occasionally adding wash and watercolor to her compositions. Yet when she departed for Easton in July 1879, she embarked on a new artistic path. The artist documented this pivotal moment in her only known autobiographical manuscript:

In 1879, my husband going on an expedition to the then unexplored Yellowstone Country advised my taking up etching during his absence and during that summer I etched six plates taking them directly to nature and working entirely out of doors. On the strength of these I was made a member of the New York Etching Club, and the following winter a member of the Royal Society of Painters Etchers [sic].

Given her success in other media, notably oil painting and illustration, her pursuit of etching may seem unexpected. However, etching was the medium of the moment, attracting the attention of notable American artists, critics, and collectors.

In 1878, Thomas Moran purchased and installed an etching press in the couple’s home-studio located at 9 Thomas Street in Newark, New Jersey. Daughter Ruth Moran recalled her father pulling the first plate from the press: “The old studio in Newark…had its floor strengthened and we got a press. Such excitement when the prints of the first plate were pulled – a small one called *A Bazaar*, characterized by vigorous, almost Rembrandtesque biting, with a

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curious effect added by means of sandpapering... All of the plates were successes from the start."4 Moran had briefly experimented with etching two decades prior: in 1860, he received an etching lesson from Philadelphia engraver John Sartain, who according to critic Henry Russell Wray, “practically illustrated for Thomas Moran and Stephen J. Ferris, the process of etching. Before his enthusiastic audience of two, Mr. Sartain prepared a plate, made a drawing, and described the action of acids on different metals.”5 The opportunity to learn the etching process from an esteemed printmaker such as Sartain was not lost on either Moran or Ferris, both of whom went on to execute important works in the medium.

At the time of Sartain’s demonstration, American printmakers used etching primarily in conjunction with engraving to expedite the production of reproductive prints. It may have been the medium’s association with a purely reproductive function that led Moran to abandon etching after his initial experiments. Art historian Thomas Bruhn has argued that, “Moran might well have turned away from etching because the medium showed little commercial possibility unless combined with engraving.”6 As a result, he pursued more lucrative printmaking processes such as wood engraving, lithography, and chromolithography.

During Moran’s seventeen-year etching hiatus, which lasted from 1861 to 1877, the identity of the medium and the status of the etcher underwent a dramatic transformation. Art historian Emma Chambers argues that this transformation was the result of stylistic influences, as well as major shifts in art criticism and changes to the institutional and market structures of the art world.7 When Moran purchased an etching press in 1878, his renewed interest in the medium

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5 Wray, 53-54. At the time of this etching demonstration, Moran and Ferris were sharing a studio in Philadelphia with John Sartain’s son, Samuel Sartain. Anderson, 182 and 186.
followed this dramatic transformation and he produced five original etchings that very year.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, Nimmo Moran’s decision to pursue etching in 1879 reflects the medium’s growing appeal with professional artists, notably landscape painters, who experimented with etching as an extension of their \textit{plein-air} practice.

Over the next two decades, American artists, critics, and collectors enthusiastically embraced etching and a movement – at times described as a craze or mania – quickly developed around the medium. Known as the etching “revival,” it reached its height in the United States in the 1880s, yet the seeds of its success were planted twenty years prior in France and England. As an increasing number of European and American artists began producing original prints, etching emerged as the preferred printmaking process adopted by professional painters. These artists became known as painter-etchers and their works as painter-etchings, defined by American art critic J.R.W. Hitchcock as “a freehand drawing upon a grounded plate, autographic in character, expressing the individuality of the artist in lines directed by the immediate brain-impulse of the man [or woman], suggestive rather than elaborated.”\textsuperscript{9}

When Nimmo Moran executed her first plate in 1879, etching had been “revived” or, as it will be argued, redefined as a modern medium suitable for conveying free, personal, and autographic expression. Shedding its association with reproductive engraving, etching emerged as a “fine” art practiced by professional painters, promoted by notable critics, exhibited internationally, and collected extensively. Her interest in and pursuit of the medium must be examined within this context, for the prints and theoretical writings of her French, British, and American contemporaries provide the framework necessary for assessing her aesthetic development, critical success, and contributions to the international painter-etcher movement.

\textsuperscript{8} These five etchings are reproduced in Anne Morand, et al., \textit{The Prints of Thomas Moran in the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art} (Tulsa: Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1986), 74-83.
Etching: Technique and History

In her 1883 article “American Etchers,” critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer explained:

The term etching has a definite and limited significance too often disregarded in popular speech…its etymological, dictionary force is at one with its employment in artistic parlance. And as it denotes not an effect but a process, there should not be the least confusion with regard to it…To etch comes from the same root as to eat, the Greek φαγω. Only such prints as are made from plates that have been acted upon by acid – bitten into, eaten away – are to be named etchings.10

The etching process was developed in the late fifteenth century from decorative metal working practices, notably those used to embellish armor. Northern European artists such as Daniel Hopfer, Urs Graf, and Albrecht Dürer are believed to have produced the first printed etchings in the early sixteenth century. The medium quickly spread to Italy and France, before reaching its height in seventeenth-century Holland, where it underwent a profound stylistic transformation from a linear to tonal process in the work of Rembrandt van Rijn.

Over time, artists have experimented with various materials and products adopting different metals, mordants, inks, and papers to develop new, innovative methods for executing etchings. Despite technological advancements, at its core the etching process has remained virtually unchanged since the early sixteenth century. “To produce a print of this kind,” Van Rensselaer advised, “the artist takes a plate – usually copper, though sometimes zinc – and coats it with a preparation formed of wax and other ingredients.”11 This acid-resistant coating is known as the ground, which is often blackened with soot from a smoking flame to create a visible contrast between the ground and the metal plate.

11 Copper is the metal most commonly used for etching plates, although iron was popular in the early sixteenth century and zinc came into use in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Artists have also experimented with other metals including brass, aluminum, and steel.
Once the plate has been prepared, the artist “draws his subject with a sharp-pointed instrument called a ‘needle’ or ‘point,’ using just sufficient pressure to remove the ground along the lines of his strokes without scratching the metal underneath.” The plate is then submerged in a shallow bath of acid, also known as mordant, which “acts upon the uncovered portions of the plate – upon the artist’s lines, that is – but has no effect upon the portions still protected by the ground.” The depth of an etched line depends upon the length of the bite time: the longer the acid “eats” or “bites” the copper plate, the deeper the line will be, the more ink it will hold, and the darker it will print in the final image. Van Rensselaer concluded that once “the ‘biting’ is accomplished, the plate is cleaned, inked, and printed on a roller press.”

After removing the ground, an etching plate is inked and printed in the same manner as other intaglio processes, such as engraving: ink is spread over the surface of the plate filling the depressed lines; the plate is wiped clean with a cloth and often with the palm of the artist’s hand to remove excess ink from the surface; it is then passed through a press with a piece of dampened paper; the pressure from the press forces the ink out of the lines and onto the paper resulting in a mirror image of the plate. While preparing, inking, and printing an etching plate requires training and considerable skill, incising a grounded plate with an etching needle is as effortless as drawing with pencil on paper.

In 1858, American artist and author John Gadsby Chapman wrote that “an etching is but a drawing made with steel points or needles…The process is most simple. Any one who can draw can etch; and in many respects it may be even easier to produce a finished and effective result by the etching-point than by either the pen or pencil.” Etching’s close association with drawing appealed to professional painters and amateur artists, who could apply their drafting

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skills to printmaking. As in a drawing, an etching is believed to capture the inner thoughts of the artist and it is often favored over other intaglio processes for its ease of execution and ability to convey personal expression and individual style.

From its inception, etching was used to produce both reproductive and original prints—the former defined as a print after a work of art in another medium; the latter defined as a print conceived of and realized by an artist as an original composition. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists from Albrecht Altdorfer and Parmigianino to Claude Lorrain and Rembrandt created original etchings, experimenting with new subjects, techniques, and printing styles. Parmigianino was among the earliest etchers to exploit the freedom of the etched line, taking full advantage of the medium’s sketch-like capabilities.

Representing the landscape was also of great interest to early etchers such as Altdorfer, Claude, and Rembrandt, all of who explored the medium’s potential to capture the effects of light, weather, and atmosphere. Moreover, Rembrandt was the key figure in a generation of Dutch printmakers who experimented extensively with printed tone. Rather than relying solely on etched lines, Rembrandt exploited the tonal capabilities of acid and ink, creating a variety of painterly effects that pushed etching beyond its linear conventions.

By the eighteenth century, etching was increasingly used in conjunction with engraving for the production of large-scale reproductive prints. Although these works were often referred to simply as “engravings,” etching was almost always used to expedite production, generally

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14 The definition of an original print has been contested and widely debated since the late eighteenth century. The International Fine Print Dealers Association (IFPDA) presently defines an original print as “a work of art on paper which has been conceived by the artist to be realized as a print, rather than as a reproduction of a work in another medium.” “How to Research Prints,” The International Fine Print Dealers Association, accessed April 6, 2015, http://www.ifpda.org/content/collection_prints/faq/t2n3783. For more information on the history and challenges of defining the original print, see Pat Gilmour, “On Originality,” in Print Quarterly 25, no. 1 (March 2008): 36-50.
employed to lay down the underlying structure of a composition prior to applying other techniques to the plate, such as engraving and mezzotint. Stylistically, mixed-media reproductive prints were executed to imitate the appearance of pure line engravings – clean, linear, and highly finished. The popularity of reproductive printmaking reached its height in Europe and the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century: although relatively few individuals had the finances available to acquire original paintings and sculptures, many could afford to purchase prints produced after paintings and sculptures, and by 1840 reproductive “engravings” constituted the bulk of the print market.

Prior to 1860, reproductive prints enjoyed a prestigious status with artists and collectors. At the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris, reproductive prints were prominently displayed throughout the exhibition and several reproductive printmakers received honorary medals, including Louis Pierre Henrique-Dupont who was awarded the highest Medal of Honor. Yet there was not a single original print displayed in the exhibition despite the fact that many well-respected artists, including Eugène Delacroix, produced noteworthy examples. Art historians Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers have argued that original prints were generally regarded as preliminary drawings, rather than finished pictures, and were thus unsuitable for public exhibition.

Original Printmaking in the Nineteenth Century

Following the development of photography in 1839 and the introduction of photomechanical printmaking processes in the 1840s and 1850s, the status and security of

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reproductive printmaking was dramatically threatened. Photography emerged as a faster, more economical, and more precise method of reproduction, significantly increasing the availability and affordability of reproductive prints. Art historian Martha Tedeschi has argued that the impact of photographic technology upon the print market was not nearly as rapid or revolutionary as it has often been assumed. Instead, she notes that “the victory of technology over handicraft was certainly not immediate,” but instead should be understood as “a more gradual agent of change, one which beginning in the 1850s plunged the status of printmaking into ambiguity, but which eventually mediated an altered set of relationships between the artist, the spectator, the printed image, and the original work of art.”

As photography shifted the relationship between audiences and artworks, Tedeschi demonstrates that “the original actually gained in value and status as photography increasingly focused public and critical attention on the ideologies and processes of reproduction.” In the first half of the nineteenth century, a reproductive print was a suitable high-art surrogate for an original work of art; yet photography’s ability to capture and convey the physical properties of a painting or sculpture – including brushwork, impasto, and surface texture – helped to advance the public’s appreciation for the distinctive qualities of an original. Tedeschi writes that, “it was as though a curtain had lifted, and viewers could now perceive the unique character of every original as well as aspects of the artist’s personality.”

Her last point is of particular importance, for photography greatly influenced the growing interest in and fascination with the personal touch of the artist. Photographs and photomechanical

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20 Ibid., 96-97.
21 For a detailed discussion of photography’s influence on the growing appreciation for the original artwork, see Ibid., 137-146, especially 140-143.
22 Ibid., 142.
prints not only enabled viewers to identify and distinguish the facture of different artists, but they also underscored the impersonal quality of reproductive engravings, which were executed in a uniform visual syntax that could not adequately capture the physical characteristics of the original. As a result, there was a new and sustained enthusiasm for original artworks, including the original print, which although capable of being reproduced in multiples was nevertheless believed to offer a closer, more immediate connection to the artist.

Nineteenth-century critics aimed to educate the public on the differences between reproductive and original printmaking, often invoking historical precedents to support the primacy of the original over the reproduction. In 1868, a critic in *The Art Journal* compared the reproductive prints of Marcantonio Raimondi to the original prints of Albrecht Dürer: “There is a great difference between the genius of the two men. Whereas Marc Antonio [sic] worked almost entirely after the designs of others, Albert [sic] Dürer engraved his own compositions, and his fund of invention was as exhaustless as his ideas were original.” This distinction was new in print literature and, as Tedeschi argues, was the direct consequence of photography, which “more than any other circumstance…effected the separation of the reproduction from the original.”

While many artists and critics supported the widespread, democratic dissemination of printed imagery, others believed that mass production and widespread distribution degraded the fine art status of printmaking. In response to the inflated market of reproductive prints, artists, printers, publishers, dealers, and critics banded together to pursue strategies of reform, the most successful of which was the movement to redefine original printmaking and the status of the original printmaker. Etching took center stage in the battle of the original verses the reproduction – a battle that was waged on both sides of the Atlantic.

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24 Ibid., 143.
Art critic and print curator Sylvester Rosa Koehler defined original etchers – also known as painter-etchers – as those “who either work from nature or compose directly upon the plate, or else reproduce only their own designs…the charm of the painter’s etching lies to a great extent in its originality…it admits us into his intimacy without any restraint of conventional forms; it puts us into direct communication with him, thus removing all fear that his utterances may have been misrepresented.”25 Beginning in the early 1860s, these artists launched what Tedeschi describes as “an aggressive and self-conscious campaign to distinguish the esoteric knowledge and skill offered by the painter-etcher from services provided by other producers of prints, including reproductive engravers, photographers, amateur and female practitioners.”26

The process of differentiating original etching from popular reproductive printmaking – and by extension elevating the status of the painter-etcher over that of the reproductive printmaker – required a two-fold strategy of exclusion. Firstly, etching was removed from the commercial and amateur realm it was believed to occupy in the first half of the century and it was redefined as a “high” art practiced by professional painters. Secondly, the medium was positioned as a refined, intellectual, and anti-industrial art form that could only be understood and collected by an elite “few” – in sharp contrast to the reproductive prints produced for and consumed by the “many.”27

Chambers has argued that etching’s shifting identity was the result of painter-etchers successfully capitalizing on “the increasing interest in the creative personality of the artist as opposed to subject matter.”28 As artists, critics, dealers, and collectors came to value individual

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26 Tedeschi, 170.
27 Ibid., 172.
28 Chambers, 6.
style and signs of artistic labor, etching emerged as a medium particularly suitable for conveying personal expression. Chambers writes:

Increasing value was attached to signs of a personal artistic style...This was clearly compatible with the technique of etching, which had always been promoted as an ideal medium for expressing the thought process and inspiration of the artist, and which was akin to drawing or handwriting in its ability to show the marks of an individual’s style unmediated by the linear conventions adopted by engraving. The success of nineteenth-century etchers in reinventing their art lay in their ability to promote those aspects of the medium associated with drawing on the plate whilst minimizing references to the chemical process by which the etching was created.  

Etching was promoted as the printmaking medium capable of capturing an artist’s personal, autographic style and it was deliberately positioned as the antithesis of the mechanic, imitative, and impersonal reproductive print.

**Mid-Nineteenth-Century Etching: Revival or Redefinition?**

The movements to promote original etching in mid-nineteenth-century France, England, and the United States are most commonly described as etching “revivals.” Yet the concept of a “revival” was contrived and depended upon the belief that original etching had at one point died. Nineteenth-century accounts of etching’s “revival” generally maintain that following the death of Rembrandt in 1669 original etching was abandoned, falling into a state of considerable disuse. Nearly two hundred years would pass before artists and critics “rediscovered” the medium’s capacity for creative expression. In 1890, American publisher and print dealer Frederick Keppel summarized this widely circulated account of etching’s evolution:

Perhaps the most important event in the history of etching is the wonderful revival of the art which took place toward the middle of the present century. Etching had degenerated from its true principles as exemplified by Rembrandt, until it sunk into a coarse and easy substitute for line engraving, instead of remaining as free and untrammeled as the clouds in a summer sky, when a few thoughtful artists in France and England awoke to the conviction that it was an art apart, and with a language of its own.  

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29 Chambers, 6.
This narrative constitutes a strategic rewriting of etching’s history, erasing the important contributions of professional and amateur etchers who worked in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Critics and artists of the mid-nineteenth century etching “revival” went to great lengths to discredit earlier etchers, typically dismissing them as inept, incompetent, and unimportant. In 1864, British critic Philip Gilbert Hamerton admitted that “the art has, it is true, never been wholly extinct since the days of Rembrandt; for a few artists and amateurs have always, in a desultory manner, amused themselves with etching.” In 1883, Van Rensselaer echoed Hamerton’s condescending sentiment acknowledging the existence of early American etchers but arguing that “it would be too much to say that any of these men were etchers in the true sense of the word…still less were they etchers of originality and force. Usually they drew upon the copper with little idea of its unique requirements and with results of no artistic value.”

Such rhetoric was so successful and convincing that it led critics and scholars to indiscriminately accept the revivalist narrative as fact. In England, for instance, Tedeschi notes that “authors and periodicals not specifically linked to the etching movement were quickly persuaded that there had been virtually no worthwhile original etchings produced in England before the beginning of the ‘revival.’ This attitude permeated turn-of-the-century writing and has become a truth accepted virtually without question by modern scholars.” It was not until the early 1990s that art historians began to question the validity of this narrative. In doing so, they have uncovered a rich history of original etching that existed between 1669 and 1850 in France,

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33 Tedeschi, 185.
England, and the United States. In light of such scholarship, the notion of a nineteenth-century etching “revival” is problematic. Yet “revival” was the term used by the vast majority artists and critics throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and it had a profound influence upon contemporary perceptions of the medium. But why position the painter-etcher movement as a “revival”? What was to be gained by discrediting and dismissing earlier etchers? And if original etching never really died, what exactly were these artists “reviving”?

The movement’s primary objective was to disassociate etching from the reproductive, commercial, amateur, and feminine realm it was believed to occupy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Etching was instead promoted as a “high” art, practiced by professional painters who were assumed to be men. By discrediting their immediate predecessors, mid-nineteenth-century painter-etchers created a distinct tradition of fine art etching, which they claimed developed along an entirely separate path from the popular and degraded prints of the previous era. Theirs was an art with a revered, historic past, namely the innovative, painterly, and original etchings of Rembrandt. By “reviving” his tonal aesthetic, they strategically positioned themselves as the direct descendants of Rembrandt – or as Keppel christened them “The Modern Disciples of Rembrandt” – legitimizing their own pursuit of the medium.

Although mid-nineteenth-century painter-etchers and their advocates did not “revive” original etching – in the true sense of the word – they did redefine the style and status of the medium in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chambers argues that this redefinition was “effected as much by the languages of art criticism and the changing social, institutional and

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35 Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, when referring to the etching “revival” of the mid-nineteenth century, I will place the term in quotation marks to underscore its contrived and manufactured meaning.
mercantile structures through which etchers promoted their work as by the influence of individuals.\textsuperscript{36} The rhetoric adopted in technical treatises, art criticism, and academic lectures played a powerful role in redefining etching, which Chambers demonstrates came to be understood as “a painter’s art rather than a reproductive process.”\textsuperscript{37}

Critics in France, England, and the United States – including Charles Baudelaire, Philip Gilbert Hamerton, Francis Seymour Haden, and Sylvester Rosa Koehler – drew clear and definitive distinctions between the controlled lines, high finish, and clean printing of what they disparagingly referred to as “engraver’s etchings” and the fluidity, spontaneity, tonality, and individuality of modern or “true” etchings. Art historian Thomas Bruhn notes that in the United States, critics were not interested in “whether one etched but how one etched,” and it was the how that dramatically changed in the second half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{38}

In the introduction to his series “The Work of the American Etchers,” Koehler outlined the three characteristics that (re)defined painter-etchings of the mid-nineteenth-century “revival”:

1. Absolute freedom of line, as the point, if rightly used without too much pressure, plays upon the ground with even less friction than the pencil does upon paper. 2. A warmth of line and consequently a possibility of indicating color, far beyond that attainable in line engraving. The burin line, comparatively speaking, is sharp and clear cut, and it is this quality mainly which produces the cold, metallic effect so often complained of in works executed entirely with the burin. The etched line, on the contrary, is rugged and jagged along its edges, and this imparts “warmth” and life to it. 3. A range of color, varying from the faintest gray to the deepest velvety black, such as no other process offers.\textsuperscript{39}

In order to achieve freedom, warmth, and color in their etched works, artists experimented with substantial plate and ink manipulations, which could be achieved through mechanical means with tools and techniques, such as the roulette, Scotch stone, sandpaper, and retrousage, as well

\textsuperscript{36} Chambers, 6.
\textsuperscript{37} For a detailed review of British etching “revival” treatises, art criticism, and lectures, see Ibid., 13-42.
\textsuperscript{38} Bruhn, \textit{The American Print}, 8.
as through chemical processes, including bite time, acid tints, and sulfur tints.\textsuperscript{40} Bruhn argues that these manipulations “were viewed as purely aesthetic choices that, together with the autographic, etched line, underscored the presence of the artist in the creation of the print and diminished the otherwise mechanical aspects of the process. Artistic originality and manipulation of the medium were real issues.”\textsuperscript{41}

The medium’s technical and stylistic redefinition can be traced in the original etchings of artists who worked both before and after the “revival.” In the United States, the shift is generally said to have begun in 1876 – the year of the Centennial Exhibition – after which there was a dramatic transformation in the quantity and quality of American etchings. Wray emphasized that there was “little similarity between the early efforts in etching and the work which appeared after the Centennial year,” for this momentous exhibition created etching’s “first perceptible ripple…a ripple, which increased in size and spread in a popular tidal wave over the country.”\textsuperscript{42}

The works of American artists Henry Farrer and R. Swain Gifford – both of who etched original prints before and after 1876 – exemplify the medium’s stylistic evolution. In 1870, Farrer published a set of original etchings depicting \textit{Scenes of Old New York}, including his \textit{Old House Corner of Peck Slip and Water Street} (figure 3.1). In this series, Farrer adopted a clean, linear style, which Koehler noted had “the tendency to high finish and over-elaboration…the plates then executed have something of a methodical character and orderliness which would tempt one to call them ‘engraver’s etchings.’”\textsuperscript{43}

In 1879, nine years after Farrer published \textit{Scenes of Old New York}, Koehler reported that the prints “no longer satisfy the artist’s own demands, and he has therefore decided to withdraw

\textsuperscript{40} Bruhn, \textit{The American Print}, 7.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{42} Wray, 60 and 63.
Comparing *Old House Corner of Peck Slip and Water Street* (figure 3.1) to one of Farrer’s later etchings, such as *Sunset, Gowanus Bay* (1880, figure 3.2), reveals a clear stylistic shift: in the latter print, he adopted a free, autographic line and created rich tonal contrasts by heavily inking his plate. He also manipulated ink and strategically applied plate tone to capture the luminous effects of sunset. When examining these etchings side by side, one could reasonably assume that each print was the product of a different hand.

The etchings of Farrer’s contemporary R. Swain Gifford underwent a similar stylistic transformation. By the late 1870s, Gifford abandoned the sober linearism of his early etchings, seen in works such as *Old Trees at Naushon Island* (1864, figure 3.3), instead pursuing a more spontaneous style. His *Evening (Nonquitt)* (1878, figure 3.4) is characteristic of his post-Centennial etchings, in which he explored tonal possibilities by varying the length and depth of his etched lines. Similar to Farrer, Gifford later dismissed his early prints, writing to Koehler in September 1879: “I find them so different from what I consider the true spirit of Etching.”

Etching’s redefinition as a free and individualistic medium reflected broader stylistic shifts in the art world. Koehler advised readers that the medium’s evolution was “due to the generally changed character of art, and is not observable in etching alone.” Art’s new character resulted from the increased interest in the personality of the artist and the pictorial qualities of expression, which paralleled the declining interest in subject matter. “Few people nowadays ask for a statue of the Madonna or a picture of Christ Crucified, or of Truth Vanquishing Falsehood.”

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47 Koehler, *Etching*, 19-20. Print curator Frank Weitenkampf later acknowledged the importance of Koehler’s assessment, writing that he “rather ingeniously points out that it was the rising French influence in art, after the middle of the century, bringing with it the note of individualism which was the real factor of importance in the development of painter-etching here [in the United States].” Frank Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 7.
Koehler explained. “What we want is a specimen of Mr. Smith’s or Miss Jones’s work. It is this desire which leads to the establishment of rich men’s galleries, while even the less wealthy can satisfy their longings by a collection of etchings.” This shift, he argued, began with the rise of Romanticism in France – a movement that emphasized individuality and subjectivity, and in which “more attention is paid to the purely pictorial qualities of art, – to color and to effects of light and shade.” Since etching was regarded as a “magician in the expression of these qualities,” Koehler concluded, “it stands to reason that it should be most highly valued when they are esteemed of the first importance.”

**France**

The nineteenth-century movement to promote and professionalize, redefine and “revive” etching as a medium for original artistic expression began in France in the 1830s and 1840s, when it was “rediscovered” by several artists associated with the French school of Romantic landscape painters. Known at the time as the École de 1830, but better-known today as the Barbizon School, these artists emphasized the importance of studying directly from nature and working *en plein air* in order to convey their subjective impressions of nature and capture the shifting effects of light, air, and atmosphere upon the French landscape. Although many of the Barbizon artists were dedicated first and foremost to painting, original printmaking played an important – albeit secondary – role in their production.

One exception was Charles Jacque (French, 1813-1894), who worked primarily as a printmaker producing an extensive oeuvre of nearly 470 etchings during his lifetime. Jacque began his career as a commercial printmaker illustrating books and magazines. In the 1830s,

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49 Ibid., 9-10.
while working in a geographer’s shop, he encountered the etchings of Rembrandt and subsequently produced his first etching *Head of a Woman*, which was derived from a work by the Dutch master.\(^5\) Art historian Alison McQueen has noted that Jacque and other artists of the Barbizon School were principally drawn to Rembrandt’s printmaking techniques, most significantly his use of *contre-jour* (placing dark forms against a light background); *clair-obscur* (using strong contrasts of light and dark); and the quick *croquis* (or sketch) landscape print.\(^5\)

The free spontaneity of Rembrandt’s work led many to believe that he etched directly from nature, which in turn inspired several Barbizon artists to take their copper plates out of doors.

The portability of the etching plate combined with the ease and speed with which one could draw on the ground with a point or needle made etching a particularly popular medium with landscape painters; as McQueen notes, French printmakers “found a parallel in Rembrandt’s landscapes to their desire to work directly from nature and capture the changing effects of weather and the immediacy of their chosen motifs…the Barbizon School found a precedent for their spontaneous and fluid printed drawings or *croquis* in Rembrandt’s renderings of similar subjects.”\(^5\)

As artists worked to raise the professional status of etching, Rembrandt provided an example “not only in the aesthetic realm but also as a painter-printmaker whose interests and struggles, they believed, mirrored their own.”\(^5\)

Jacque was the most prolific etcher of the Barbizon School, yet several other artists produced important works in the medium contributing to its growing popularity in France. Jean-François Millet, who was likely introduced to the medium by Jacque, created a number of

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\(^5\) Alison McQueen, *Rise of the Cult of Rembrandt: Reinventing an Old Master in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 161.

\(^5\) Ibid., 165.

\(^5\) Ibid., 169.

\(^5\) Ibid., 173.
original etchings, often producing preparatory drawings for his prints.\textsuperscript{56} Charles-François Daubigny was also a dedicated practitioner, publishing original etchings in the magazine \textit{L’Artiste} as early as 1840–42. This periodical pioneered the publishing of original prints and encouraged etching’s popularity among artists and the public.\textsuperscript{57} Daubigny also experimented with the process of \textit{cliché-verre} (a process that combines etching with photography), as did Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Théodore Rousseau. The latter two artists also produced a small number of original etchings, which although constituting only a minor fraction of their output, nevertheless speaks to the growing interest in etching among contemporary artists.

In addition to Barbizon printmakers, another etching trendsetter of the era was artist Charles Meryon (French, 1821-1868). Meryon learned to etch from printmaker Eugène Bléry, but was most inspired by the Parisian cityscapes of the seventeenth-century Dutch etcher Zeeman. Meryon etched views of Paris, focusing on the streets, buildings, and monuments of the medieval city, which was rapidly being transformed and modernized under the direction of Baron Haussmann. His prints were extremely popular with critics and etching advocates, including Edmund and Jules Goncourt, who praised the artist for capturing “the soul of the old city” and Victor Hugo, who described his etchings as “splendid” and “dazzling.”\textsuperscript{58}

Prior to mid-century, artists who practiced original etching only loosely collaborated, if at all – Meryon, for instance, worked in complete isolation – and there was no organized movement around the medium. Those who had pursued etching did so to fulfill their own aesthetic interests, and there was very little public demand for their work. Yet as the 1860s unfolded and etching’s appeal continued to grow, a network of artists, printers, publishers, and critics began to produce,

\textsuperscript{56} Esther Thyssen, \textit{Natural and Pastoral Themes by Barbizon Printmakers} (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985), 15 and Goldman, 4.
\textsuperscript{57} Goldman, 18.
\textsuperscript{58} Edmond and Jules Concourt quoted in Linda C. Hults, \textit{The Print in the Western World} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 538 and Victor Hugo quoted in Lang and Lang, 32.
exhibit, and disseminate etchings in an organized and systematic manner. In 1862, French railroad employee turned publisher Alfred Cadart founded La Société des Aquafortistes, the first etching society in France. Among the society’s members were several painters, including Delacroix, Daubigny, Millet, Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Courbet, and Edouard Manet, as well as respected printmakers Félix Bracquemond and Maxime Lalanne. Cadart’s goal was to promote original etching as an artistic and literary medium – one that had an esteemed legacy in the work of Rembrandt and yet was capable of capturing the immediacy of modern life.

While collectors of original prints traditionally purchased old master works, Cadart aimed to build a market for contemporary painter-etchings. After founding La Société des Aquafortistes, Cadart and master printer Auguste Delâtre launched the publication *Eaux-fortes modernes: Publication d’oeuvres originales et inédites*. It was the first periodical to aggressively promote original printmaking and offered subscribers “authentic” artworks by publishing five original etchings each month. Delâtre, who learned to print from Jacque and artist Louis Marvy, was a highly skilled technician who worked closely with artists when printing their plates. Cadart’s entrepreneurial spirit combined with Delâtre’s technical expertise helped ensure the popularity of *Eaux-fortes modernes*.

Cadart astutely recognized that the success of original etching required the support of influential literary figures – writers who could strategically lend their pen to the publisher’s cause. He enlisted contemporary critics, including Charles Baudelaire, Philippe Burty, Théophile Gautier, and Jules Castagnary to write introductory prefaces to each issue of *Eaux-fortes modernes*.

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60 Subscribers could purchase a regular edition for 50 francs a year or a deluxe edition (of which only twenty-five copies were available) for 100 francs a year. Individual prints were also sold for 1.50 francs each. Arnar, *The Book as Instrument*, 72-73.
61 Delâtre had been credited with printing approximately 90,000 proofs during his lifetime. Lang and Lang, 32.
modernes. Gautier wrote the preface to the first issue, outlining many of the ideas that were to emerge as central hallmarks of the etching “revival.” He asserted etching’s preeminence by comparing it to photography, a process he described as “orderly, automatic, without inspiration, [a technique] that perverts the very idea of an artist.”62 He believed it was necessary for artists to react “against the positivism of the mirror-like apparatus” by pursuing etching, an expressive art that he deemed to be an intellectual and literary medium.63

The connection between etching and literature was asserted by several critics, including Baudelaire, who in 1862 published the influential article “L’Eau-forte est à la mode,” in which he proclaimed, “Of all the different expressive forms of plastic art, etching is the one that comes closest to literary expression.”64 Castagnary also highlighted the similarities between etching and writing in his preface to the Eaux-fortes modernes, arguing that etching is a “spontaneous art like writing and powerful like printing, which makes the painter confide his thought directly to metal and which like writing can multiply copies infinitely.”65 The alignment of original etching with the literary arts elevated the medium’s status over other printmaking processes.

Etching appealed to writers on a primitive level: similar to writing, it is an art executed in black and white. Moreover, the physical act of etching – in which a needle is held between one’s thumb and forefinger, as one holds a pen or pencil – mimics the physical act of writing. An artist can freely render a wide variety of lines and marks with an etching needle and there is no need for forceful pressure or physical exertion, as the needle effortlessly glides over the prepared ground to expose the copper below. Similar to handwriting, the etched line is unique and

63 Théophile Gautier quoted in Hults, 543.
distinctive, varying from one artist to the next, and it was precisely the personal and individualistic nature of the medium that appealed to critics. Moreover, as art historian Anna Arnar notes: “an etcher’s style of mark making [was often described] as a type of writing (écriture) or even more tellingly as griffonages and gribouillage (‘scribbles’ and ‘illegible handwriting’). Men of letters commonly used these terms to evoke vigorous or highly idiosyncratic graphic marks.”

An artist’s distinct style of écriture or griffonages was not only a sign of his/her talent and individuality, but it also revealed artistic labor. While etching was celebrated as a free and spontaneous art form, many French writers asserted that the process of producing an etching required difficult mental exertion and deep commitment. Baudelaire emphasized this point, writing that etching was “like all great art, very complex beneath its apparent simplicity, it requires prolonged devotion to be brought to perfection.” By stressing the importance of artistic labor – a labor that was often described as requiring bodily strain and struggle – etching advocates were able to distinguish contemporary etchers from earlier amateurs, many of whom were women and were said to have produced works that were spontaneous and accessible.

Moreover, many artists and critics were drawn to etching’s perceived status as an outsider art. The freedom of the etched line – and printmaking’s position as “secondary” to painting and sculpture – was said to liberate etchers from tradition and convention, and thus enabled them to work outside the confines of society and the academy. Etchings were not exhibited in traditional venues, but were most often viewed in the privacy of the home: small in scale and...
capable of being held in one’s hand, they were believed to speak a private language that communicated to the viewer on a personal level. However, it was not a language that could be universally understood by the “many” for the ability to read or decipher an etching was said to be the province of an elite “few.”

Baudelaire was influential in promoting the selective legibility of etching, which he believed was an intellectual art to be practiced by skilled professionals for the consumption of a cultivated audience. He warned against etching’s development into a popular art form, writing that he hoped it would not “win as great a popularity as it did in London in the heighday [sic] of the Etching Club, when even fair ‘ladies’ prided themselves on their ability to run an inexperienced needle over the varnished plate. A typically British craze, a passing mania which would bode ill for us.”

In the end, it was etching’s expressive, autographic potential combined with its status as a marginal and intellectual medium that ensured its popularity as an original art form capable of capturing the varied experiences of modern life.

Several influential French printmakers pursued etching, including Bracquemond, Lalanne, Alphonse Legros, and Jules Jacquemart, whose works Cadart published first in *Eaux-fortes modernes* and later in *L’Illustration nouvelle*. In addition to original prints, Cadart published etching manuals and treatises, the most influential of which was Lalanne’s *Traité de la gravure à l’eau-forte* (1866). In this text, Lalanne defined the differences between etching and engraving, distinguishing the freedom and freshness of the former from the measured regularity

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71 Charles Baudelaire quoted in Chambers, 4.
72 As a result of financial challenges, Cadart folded La Société des Aquafortistes and *Eaux-fortes modernes* in 1867. A year later, he began a new journal *L’Illustration nouvelle*, which he published until his untimely death in 1875. Cadart’s widow and son took over the publication after his death, until they declared bankruptcy seven years later. Janine Bailly-Herzberg, “French Etching in the 1860’s,” *Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1872), 386.
and “almost mathematical workmanship” of the latter. According to Lalanne, it was precisely these qualities that justified etching’s preeminent status:

By its very character of freedom, by the intimate and rapid connection which it establishes between the hand and the thoughts of the artist, etching becomes the frankest and most natural of interpreters. These are the qualities which make it an honor to art, of which it is a glorious branch. All other styles of engraving can never be any thing but a means of reproduction.

Lalanne argued that etching, unlike engraving, is capable of expressing individuality for it “bears the imprint of the character of the artist. It personifies and represents him so well, it identifies itself so closely with his idea, that it often seems on the point of annihilating itself as a process in favor of this idea.” In addition to his ideological assertions, Lalanne’s treatise served as an important manual on the technical process of etching: he outlined the necessary tools and materials and provided step-by-step instructions for preparing a plate, drawing with the needle, biting, burnishing, and printing. His treatise was a valuable resource and was wildly popular with artists and critics first in France and later in the United States, where Sylvester Rosa Koehler translated it into English.

**England**

The movement to promote and professionalize original etching soon made its way across the English Channel, where the medium’s “revival” was encouraged by a small group of influential artists, critics, printers, and publishers. Two of these individuals – James McNeill Whistler and his brother-in-law Francis Seymour Haden – began their etching efforts in France. Whistler moved to Paris in 1855 and three years later published his first set of etchings titled

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74 Ibid., 7.
75 Ibid., 6.
76 In 1847, Haden married Whistler’s sister Deborah. The two men collaborated extensively on etchings throughout the 1850s, yet a jealous rivalry soon developed and following a physical fight in a Paris café in 1867, the two men never spoke again. On Haden and Whistler’s rivalry and falling out, see Katharine A, Lochnan, *The Etchings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven: Published in association with the Art Gallery of Ontario by Yale University Press, 1984), 137-146.
Douze eaux-fortes d'après Nature (Twelve Etchings from Nature), popularly known as the “French Set.” Composed of twelve plates etched in England, France, and Germany between 1857 and 1858, Whistler’s “French Set” was printed in Paris by Delâtre, before the plates were brought to London. Whistler dedicated the set to his brother-in-law, who had introduced him to the etchings of Rembrandt in the 1840s.

Haden began drawing and etching while studying medicine at the Sorbonne in the early 1840s. Although his initial efforts were executed for practical study, his interest in the medium soon developed into a passionate pastime. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, he amassed an extensive collection of seventeenth-century Dutch etchings, including 129 by Rembrandt. Haden, who was visiting Paris on business in 1858, joined Whistler at Delâtre’s shop for the printing of his “French Set.” Both men were impressed and inspired by Delâtre’s “artistic printing,” a method in which a thin film of ink – also known as plate tone – is left on the surface of the etched plate and wiped judiciously in order to create areas of light and shadow. Influenced by the printing techniques of Rembrandt, Delâtre used plate tone to achieve chiaroscuro effects, often varying the color of the ink and the type of paper to enhance the mood of a print or change its tone from warm to cool.

Art historian Katherine Lochnan argues that it was “Delâtre’s method of ‘painting’ with ink on the plate which inspired Whistler and Haden to experiment with chiaroscuro effects and the lighting of compositions from within.”

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77 In London, the plates were printed under the direction of Delâtre with the assistance of Whistler and Haden, who also facilitated the marketing of the “French Set.” On Whistler’s “French Set,” see Lochnan, 49-59 and Margaret F. MacDonald et al., James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, A Catalogue Raisonné (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2012), accessed September 23, 2014, http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/sets_texts/?eid=french.
78 For a reproduction of the title page with the inscribed dedication to Haden, see Lochnan, 54.
79 For a comprehensive examination of Haden’s etched oeuvre, see Richard S. Schneiderman, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints of Sir Francis Seymour Haden (London: Garten, 1983).
80 On Haden’s interest in Rembrandt, see Lochnan, 5-7.
81 Ibid., 55.
82 Ibid.
After the successful printing of Whistler’s “French Set,” Haden pursued etching more seriously, installing a press in his London home where he and Whistler bit and printed several of their early plates. Although he always maintained his status as an amateur etcher, Haden was one of the most prolific practitioners of his era. He was also an ardent advocate and influential spokesman promoting the professionalization of etching in both England and the United States. After his etchings were rejected from exhibition at London’s Royal Academy in 1850, Haden launched a lifelong campaign to establish original etching as a preeminent fine art practiced by professionals whose status equaled that of other visuals artists.

As his etchings gained international recognition, Haden began to formulate the theoretical principles necessary to elevate the medium’s status as a professional fine art. In 1866, he published an influential article titled “About Etching” in *The Fine Arts Quarterly Review*. While French critics had positioned etching as the antithesis of photography, Haden instead contrasted the medium with line engraving writing that “there is not, therefore, and there never was, anything that could be called a rivalry between the etchers and the later engravers. They represent distinct classes – the class of the artist and the class of the copyist.” He described the etched line as “free, expressive, full of variety…as personal as the hand-writing,” and the engraved line as “cold, constrained, and uninteresting…without identity.”

In an effort to assert etching’s superiority over line engraving – which he deemed to be a “secondary art” – Haden defined the distinctive qualities of original etching:

The properties of the etching line are, in point of fact, almost wholly mental – those of the engraved line wholly, or almost wholly, mechanical. The mental properties of the etching line are originality and personality…out of which properties, again, come

83 On the collaborative etching efforts of Haden and Whistler in London, see Lochnan, 59-66.
84 Lang and Lang, 42.
86 Ibid., 147.
87 Ibid., 150.
qualities of expression, delicacy, colour, tenderness, and whatever else the artist is capable of. The burin line being without either originality or personality is without mental expression, except such as may be evolved from it in the act of copying.\footnote{Haden, “About Etching,” 151-152.}

He asserts that “line engraving should be among the least esteemed of the arts because, in it, the objectionable element is not only paraded but reduced to an absurd formality,” leading him to ask the question, “How, then…does it happen that this form of art has imposed itself upon us for so long, and that line engravers, who are copyists, are admitted to the honours of the Academy, while Etchers, who are artists, have scarcely a \textit{locus standi} there?”\footnote{Ibid., 152.}

Perhaps more influential than his condemnation of line engraving was Haden’s theory of the “labour of omission.” He argued that the etcher’s greatest and most challenging task was “to omit, to keep his subject open, to preserve breadth, to establish his planes, and to secure for them space, light, and air. If he succeeds in expressing his whole picture in this broad way, the common observer will see in his work only a ‘sketch;’ but the faculty of doing it supposes, as we have said, a concentration and a reticence requisite in no other art.”\footnote{Ibid., 153.} Similar to Baudelaire, he believed that etching’s free, spontaneous, and sketch-like quality disguises the difficult mental labor that goes into producing an original print: he explained that an etcher must practice “rigid selection” and an economy of line, for “every stroke he makes tells strongly against him if it is bad, or proves him to be a master if it is good. In no branch of art does a touch go for so much.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Moreover, he argued that etching’s simplicity was a “learned simplicity,” one that required the etcher to study directly from nature in order to hone skills of observation, selection, and omission: “The skill that grows out of these habits is the skill required by the Etcher. It is the skill of the analyst and of the synthesist – the skill to combine and the skill to separate – to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[88] Haden, “About Etching,” 151-152.
\item[89] Ibid., 152.
\item[90] Ibid., 153.
\item[91] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
compound and to simplify – to detach plane from plane – to fuse detail into mass – to subordinate definition to space, distance, light, and air.” It was Whistler more than any other artist of the era whose work embodied the etching aesthetic promoted by Haden. Whistler’s successful economy of line, although criticized at times for its sketch-like incompleteness, illustrated that an etcher need not fill a plate with etched lines to create a finished picture.

Haden’s preference for the sketch aesthetic reflects the influence of contemporary French painting and printmaking. By 1850, many French artists, including members of the Barbizon School had abandoned the traditional practice of creating preparatory études or studies, instead recording their impressions directly on canvas or the copper plate in order to maintain a sense of immediacy. By linking England’s etching “revival” to modern French art, Haden emphasized the international character of the painter-etcher movement. Many of Haden’s theories on art and etching were influenced by the writings of contemporary British critic Philip Gilbert Hamerton. A professional writer, as well as amateur artist and etcher, Hamerton authored several books on modern French and English art. In 1864, he published his first article on etching titled “Modern Etching in France,” in which he outlined the history of La Société des Aquafortistes and described the works of contemporary French painter-etchers, including Corot, Daubigny, Jacquemart, and Meryon – the last of whom he deemed “unquestionably the greatest.”

At the end of the article, Hamerton declared that “after examining the works of these and other living French aquafortists, after visiting a publishing-house which devotes itself especially to etchings, and a printing-house where nothing else is printed, the writer feels himself

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92 Haden, “About Etching,” 156.
93 Chambers argues that Haden’s theories were influenced by Hamerton’s article “Analysis and Synthesis of Painting,” published in The Fine Arts Quarterly Review in 1864. Chambers, 28-29 and 31.
authorized to announce that etching as a productive art is at length revived in France.”96 In contrast, he noted that the production of original etchings in England “bears no proportion whatever to that of pictures and engravings; nor is etching to be considered with us anything more than a hobby of a few artists and collectors and their friends.”97

If original etching was to be “revived” in England as it had been in France, Hamerton lay the burden on the consumer, who had the power refuse to “buy any[thing] but original etching, and by selecting these always with a view to truth and imagination, not mechanical polish…Where there is a demand for truth and originality they [original etchings] will spring vigorously, where there is none they will languish and decline.”98 Similar to Baudelaire, Hamerton emphasized the idiosyncratic character of the medium, which he compared to writing: “There are certain forms of art so strangely abstracted and abbreviated that very great knowledge is required in the spectator to read them at all, just as it is necessary to understand a language thoroughly if we would read letters written in it in a hurried hand-writing, full of marks and abbreviations peculiar to the individual writer.” Etchings could only be read, understood, and appreciated by cultivated audiences – “the most intelligent lovers of art” or “true connoisseurs” as Hamerton described them: “To the informed judge, this kind of expression is, from its perfect frankness, peculiarly interesting; to the ordinary spectator it is uninteresting, because illegible.”99

Hamerton further developed his theories on modern etching in his influential treatise *Etching and Etchers* published in London in 1868.100 In the preface, Hamerton described “the central idea of etching,” which he defined as “the free expression of purely artistic thought: of all the arts known to us as yet, etching is the best fitted for this especial purpose…If an artist can

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96 Hamerton, “Modern Etching in France,” 96.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 97.
99 Ibid., 69.
express artistic thought, but cannot express it freely, he may draw well, or paint well, but etching is not suitable for him; and if he has freedom of hand, but not thought, he cannot etch in the true sense.”¹⁰¹ He conceived of this text as both a practical and theoretical treatise, outlining the technicalities of the etching process in detail. He also provided readers with a historical overview of etchers past, assessing the contributions of Dutch, French, and English etchers. Yet his “higher aim” was to “define the objects and intentions of etching, and to show how closely its success is connected with fidelity to its central idea.”¹⁰² As in “Modern French Etching,” he emphasized originality, noting that, “an etched line, when it is good, is always in the highest possible degree suggestive, interpretative, explanatory, but hardly ever imitative.”¹⁰³ He promoted the medium as an art form unlike any other – including, he argued, oil painting, drawing, lithography, wood engraving, and line engraving – for it has a unique capacity to appeal “almost exclusively to the mind, and to the eye only as the way of communication with the mind.”¹⁰⁴

*Etching and Etchers* was popular not only with print connoisseurs, but also with the general public and the treatise was in its third edition by 1880.¹⁰⁵ A luxury publication, it included examples of original etchings by artists such as Rembrandt, Haden, and Lalanne in an effort to bring readers closer to “the master’s own hand.”¹⁰⁶ Although Hamerton was concerned that readers in London and Paris might find the information in his treatise to be “superfluous,” his descriptions and illustrations were aimed at reaching a broader, more diverse audience:

> I have many readers in remote country places, in the colonies, in America, in lonely districts where not a single etching is to be referred to, and I know that these readers will be glad to have a book which contains within itself, not only an explanation of the principles of the art, but a little collection of etchings by various masters...Readers of this

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¹⁰² Ibid., viii.
¹⁰³ Ibid., xv.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., xv.
¹⁰⁵ Tedeschi, 209.
¹⁰⁶ Hamerton, *Etching and Etchers*, ix. In 1870, Hamerton established *The Portfolio*, an art journal that similarly included examples of original etchings in order to promote the prints of contemporary painter-etchers.
class will be glad to possess the few original plates by old masters which I have been able to procure, not only for their merit, in some instances perhaps not very conspicuous, but for the satisfaction of having at least some strokes by the master’s own hand.\textsuperscript{107}

Hamerton was criticized for selecting certain plates, notably the impression of Rembrandt’s \textit{Portrait of the Artist’s Mother}, which French critic Charles Blanc had urged him “not to insert, on the ground that is was not rare enough, and not a fine specimen of the master.” Hamerton defended his decision to include the print, noting that Blanc “spoke as an eminent Parisian, critic to whom all collections are accessible, and did not, in my view, sufficiently consider the position of readers who inhabit such regions as the banks of the Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{108}

Hamerton envisioned the widespread implications of his treatise and understood the importance of developing an international market for original etching. In 1893, Wray noted that, “Mr. Hamerton could have taken no better territorial extreme for his illustration than our remote Mississippi. Little did he dream, however, that in so short a time, many original proofs of the greatest etchings and almost all important reproductions would be gathered by these same western uncultivated emigrants, even many miles beyond the broad river to the far Pacific slope, where to-day are treasured collections of prints, to be envied by the Parisian connoisseur.”\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{The United States}

While the etching “revival” was thriving in France and England, the movement developed slowly and intermittently in the United States over the course of the 1860s and 1870s. Cadart was among the earliest etching advocates to recognize the commercial potential of establishing a market for original prints stateside. In the early 1860s, he began selling modern French etchings to American collectors in Paris, including the Baltimore-born art dealer George Lucas. He subsequently traveled to the United States, arriving in 1866 with a collection of

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\textsuperscript{107} Hamerton, \textit{Etching and Etchers}, ix.  \\
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., ix-x.  \\
\textsuperscript{109} Wray, 42-43.
\end{flushleft}
contemporary French paintings, etchings, and etching supplies. Koehler described Cadart as the “godfather” who “came over here as a missionary, to show Americans what French art was (of which they had never heard until then) and to preach to them the gospel of etching. The hold of the vessel which carried the apostle was filled with a precious cargo of Corots, etc., etc., and with an immense store of etching tools and materials, among which even old rags had not been forgotten.”

Upon his arrival, Cadart held etching demonstrations and organized a traveling exhibition of paintings and prints that was shown in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The exhibition introduced American audiences to the etched works of artists such as Bracquemond, Daubigny, Lalanne, and Meryon, providing as Hitchcock wrote, “the general public and a majority of our artists their first opportunity to see a collection of modern painters’ etchings.”

When reviewing Cadart’s exhibition, The New York Times reported that his selection of contemporary French etchings was of even greater interest than the paintings on display:

This club [La Société des Aquafortistes] has sent representative works of its members here for exhibition, to be seen daily at the Derby Gallery. The peculiar works of Courbet, Diaz, Gustave Dore, and some other well-known French artists, are an attraction, but the bulk of the collection is not such as to commend itself to public approbation. The etchings, of which there is a copious display, are much more attractive than the paintings, and the desire to resuscitate this mode of giving us in their own lines the spirited studies of artists in their sketching moments is deserving of all encouragement.

The Times critic then highlighted the advantageous qualities of the medium, describing the etching process as a “simple one”:

As a proof of this we saw on our latest visit [to the Derby Gallery] a proof of an etching, the first ever done by him, of one of our resident artists. The sketch was highly spirited, representing an army team struggling through Virginian swamps; very much superior in effort to the best thing ever given in any of our illustrated journals, simply because the

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112 Hitchcock, 29.
artist, who alone can seize the spirit of his scene, here interprets it himself, and we receive it from his own hand direct, not dwarfed and distorted, through the painful instrumentality of a mechanic, but with all the freshness of its originality about it.  

This description, which emphasizes the connection between etching and the artist’s hand, as well as the medium’s freshness and originality, echoes much of the critical rhetoric published on the medium in both France and England.

In addition to educating the public on the value of painter-etchings and selling French works to American collectors, the objective of Cadart’s visit was to establish transatlantic branches of the Société des Aquafortistes in cities across the northeast. He confidently asserted that this “undertaking will be as favorably received in the United States as it has already been by the powers of Europe” and upon returning to France he was described in the press as “a Lafayette of art,” who had traveled to the U.S. with sufficient supplies “to arm ten legions of etchers. It is with this ammunition that he claimed to conquer New York, and from New York, the rest of America.” In reality, Cadart’s initial impact was far less substantial. Koehler refuted the publisher’s claim that “the new continent was conquered for the cause of etching,” asserting that “this is fiction…some few American artists did take lessons of Mr. Cadart, and some few plates were produced…[but] the conquered continent was lost as quickly as it had been won.”

Print curator Frank Weitenkampf later noted that “some impetus to the practice of original etching was given by the Frenchman’s efforts, but the results do not appear to have been

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114 “Fine Arts. Native in New-York: The French Etching Club,” 5. The etching “representing an army team struggling through Virginian swamps” is likely Edwin Forbes’s Épisode de la Guerre d’Amérique published by the Société des Aquafortistes (of which Forbes was a member) in October 1866. Ten years later, Forbes published a series of forty Civil War etchings entitled “Life Studies of the Great Army,” which were exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition. Tyler argues that it was Forbes’s contact with Cadart that informed his decision to etch rather than engrave his Civil War drawings for publication. Tyler, vii.


far reaching,” for Cadart failed to establish a single etching club in the United States.\textsuperscript{117} Yet his visit did stimulate interest in the medium among a small group of American artists, who over the course of the late 1860s and early 1870s pursued etching with increased enthusiasm. Wray acknowledged that Cadart “gave many artists the first real insight into the hidden power of etching, and prompted such men as Victor Nehlig, Edwin Forbes, J. Folcroft Cole, and J.M. Falconer, to experiment with it and to declare themselves disciples of the needle.”\textsuperscript{118} His technical demonstrations were of particular interest to aspiring young artists, including Elihu Vedder and Albion Harris Bicknell, both of who learned to etch directly from the publisher.\textsuperscript{119} These early American etchers worked primarily in isolation and a cohesive etching movement would not flourish in the United States for another decade.

Perhaps more noteworthy than Cadart’s influence on American artists was his influence on American collectors, several of who developed a new and sustained interest in acquiring contemporary French and English etchings. Wray explains that, “One beneficial effect resulting from Cadart’s visit was the interest aroused for collecting proofs. Wealthy men in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and western cities gathered into their portfolio valuable impressions, from the study of which many of our artists credit their first etching inspiration.”\textsuperscript{120} Most prominent among these wealthy men was Samuel Putnam Avery, who began purchasing modern French etchings after Cadart’s visit and subsequently traveled to Paris to acquire inexpensive etched impressions by Jacque, Daubigny, Meryon, Delacroix, and Millet.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{117} Weitenkampf, 8.
\textsuperscript{118} Wray, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{119} Tyler, vii.
\textsuperscript{120} Wray, 54.
\textsuperscript{121} Hitchcock reports that when Avery visited Paris “he found the etchings of Jacque and Daubigny lying unsold in shops on the quay, although the price was only a franc or a franc and a half. Desiring to obtain a complete set of Daubigny’s etching, Mr. Avery visited the artist, who selected fifty proofs and signed them. When the question of price arose, Daubigny remarked that the proofs were exceptionally good, and he thought them worth fully a franc,
based print collector James L. Claghorn, who had previously amassed a collection of old master intaglio prints, began acquiring contemporary French etchings in the wake of Cadart’s visit.

In 1874, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts sponsored a traveling exhibition of Claghorn’s collection, in which nearly one thousand of his engravings, mezzotints, and etchings were displayed at the Academy, as well as the Brooklyn Art Association, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition.\textsuperscript{122} The show featured a selection of Claghorn’s contemporary French etchings, including works by Jacque, Corot, Daubigny, and Meissonier, and in Philadelphia the exhibition was accompanied by lectures and practical etching demonstrations given by American printmakers John Sartain and William Spohn Baker.\textsuperscript{123} The exhibition’s attendance tallied in the thousands: while Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran may have seen the show when it traveled to New York, Peter Moran and his wife Emily Kelley Moran saw Claghorn’s collection (and perhaps attended one of Sartain’s etching demonstrations) in Philadelphia, where the couple was living at the time. Following the exhibition, both Peter Moran and Emily Kelley Moran began to etch, producing their first original prints in 1874 and 1875, respectively.

In December 1875, Peter Moran and Stephen J. Ferris organized an exhibition of their own “modern” etchings, which were displayed alongside the prints of contemporary European etchers.\textsuperscript{124} The show was favorably reviewed in the press and one critic aptly noted the educational value of an exhibition dedicated entirely to the art of etching:

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\textsuperscript{122} David G. Wright, \textit{Domestic and Wild: Peter Moran’s Images of America} (Baltimore: Creo Press, 2010), 24.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 24-25 and Schneider, 45.
\textsuperscript{124} In 1875, Peter Moran produced at least twelve original etchings, as well as two replica etchings after his own works in other media and three reproductive etchings after the works of other artists. Wright believes that the European etchings in this exhibition may have come from Claghorn’s collection or possibly from Ferris’ personal collection of prints. Wright, \textit{Domestic and Wild}, 25-26.
Etching is so little understood, so little appreciated, that an exhibition of this description is not only pleasing in itself, but it is highly instructive, showing where the needles lacks the strength, and where it gains in freedom over the burin. An engraving must of necessity be a work of time, and while it gains in power and finish by the tedious process of its elaboration, it loses that freshness which ever accompanies the art work quickly dashed off by a master hand. Etching is not exactly the work of a moment, but the actual draughting with the needle occupies little more time than the draughting with the pencil or crayon... In an engraving we have the artist’s headwork; in an etching we have the work of his heart.\textsuperscript{125}

Although the medium was still “so little understood, so little appreciated” in the United States, its popularity continued to grow over the course of the 1870s.

Public exhibitions of original etchings played an important role in popularizing the medium in the United States: between 1875 and 1877, the American Society of Painters in Water Colors (later the American Water Color Society) exhibited selections of contemporary French etchings, including works by Meryon and Millet. These exhibitions had a profound influence upon early American etchers, including Farrer, Gifford, Samuel Colman, and Joseph Pennell, all of who pursued the medium with greater intensity in the late 1870s.\textsuperscript{126} Yet it was the Centennial Exhibition, which opened in Philadelphia on May 10, 1876, that proved to be the tipping point, catalyzing a sustained and organized etching movement in the United States.

In her 2005 dissertation “‘Revising History’: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition,” art historian Kimberly Orcutt documents the organization, display, and critical reception of the United States’ art department at the Centennial, demonstrating the exhibition’s lasting influence upon perceptions of American art past, present, and future. She argues that, “The United States art exhibition provided not just an opportunity, but a mandate to create a canon of the country’s art from the past century, along with a historical narrative that


\textsuperscript{126} Schneider, 46-48.
would join the past to the present and enshrine a national ‘American School.’”127 However, as Orcutt illustrates, the task of defining a national “American School” quickly devolved into a divisive struggle between nativist artists – notably the New York landscapists, known today as the Hudson River School – and young cosmopolitan, expatriate artists, who studied abroad and preferred figural subjects to landscapes.128

The two factions fought intensely to determine who would represent the national school at the exhibition; yet in the end, Orcutt argues, the art display was “impossibly large and confusing, as well as controversial and riddled with absences.”129 Nevertheless, expatriate artists managed to challenge the preeminence of nativist landscape painters and in the wake of the exhibition critics were forced to come to terms with the unavoidable influence of foreign styles on American art.

Orcutt limits her study to an examination of the paintings and sculptures on display at the Centennial, since they were segregated from watercolors, drawings, prints, and photographs both in the galleries and in critical accounts.130 Yet works on paper comprised a substantial portion of the United States art exhibition and prints alone occupied five galleries.131 With the exception of photography and the decorative arts, “fine art” objects were displayed in Memorial Hall and the Art Gallery Annex – a supplemental building housing forty-five additional galleries, constructed to accommodate the exhibition’s increasing number of applicants.132 Although a substantial

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127 Kimberly Orcutt, “‘Revising History’: Creating a Canon of American Art at the Centennial Exhibition” (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2005), iv.
128 Ibid., 2.
129 Ibid., 18.
130 Ibid., 20.
131 The display of American works on paper at the Centennial Exhibition has not, to my knowledge, been the subject of close examination or scholarly research. Although etching “revival” scholars have acknowledged the importance of the Exhibition to the medium’s development in the United States, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of the works on paper in the exhibition, including an analysis of their selection, layout, and reception.
132 While paintings, sculptures, watercolors, drawings, and prints were on display in both Memorial Hall and the Art Gallery Annex, the decorative arts were exhibited in the Main Building with manufactured goods and photographs
number of original etchings were on display, the vast majority of these works were classified under the general heading of “Engravings and Lithographs,” which Wray aptly notes “spoke eloquently of the meagre knowledge of the art, even by artists.”

There was one gallery in Memorial Hall – a narrow corridor designated Gallery Z that ran along the building’s east-west axis – that contained examples of artworks from Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and the United States, including a selection of American “Drawings, Etchings, etc.” Edwin Forbes was one of five American artists who exhibited etchings at the Centennial: forty prints from his “Life Studies of the Great Army” were displayed in Gallery Z alongside a selection of American drawings, including six by Thomas Moran. In addition to Forbes, American artists Peter Moran, George Loring Brown, Stephen J. Ferris, and Charles Volkmar contributed etchings to the exhibition; however, their works hung in Gallery Number 22 of the Art Gallery Annex alongside examples of American “Engravings and Lithographs.” Forbes and Peter Moran were singled out for their graphic contributions to the Centennial and both were awarded medals of excellence for their original etchings.

The Centennial Exhibition was the first instance in which American artworks were exhibited in a broad international context within the United States. As a result, The Art Journal reported that the primary objective of the exhibition was “to compare the artistic skill of different peoples, to ascertain how the arts with us in our Centennial year stand by the side of other

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133 Wray, 58-59.
136 It is difficult to definitively determine the total number of etched impressions on display at the Centennial, as individual catalogue numbers often correspond to multiple items. For example, Peter Moran’s entry reads “Etchings on copper: five frames of animal subjects.” Cat. no. 1400 in Ibid., 59.
countries, and to gather instruction by comparison of our native work with the designs and methods of our rivals.” Orcutt illustrates that this was a particularly self-conscious moment in the history of American art, as artists were “keenly aware that their culture and taste (or to their dread, the lack of it) would be on display at the Centennial Exhibition.” Consequently, she continues, “members of the American art community must have felt they had much to prove.”

This was true not only for painters and sculptors, but also for American etchers, whose works were displayed with – and thus compared to – the original etchings of their French and English contemporaries. The French etching display was the largest at the Centennial with at least seventy original prints on view by leading contemporary painter-etchers including Jacquemart and Lalanne, who were represented by fifteen and twenty-five impressions, respectively. The Etching Club of London also submitted a selection of member etchings and Haden exhibited two prints, including his *Breaking up of the Agamemnon, No. 1* (1870, Art Institute of Chicago), for which he was awarded a medal of honor. In 1876, original etching was thriving with artists and collectors in France and England, yet the medium was still very much in its infancy in the United States.

Orcutt demonstrates that “in its time, the general public and the art community alike recognized the Centennial Exhibition as a signal moment in the nation’s cultural history” and it set the stage for what one critic described as the “rapid advancement in native artistic

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138 Ibid., 28.
139 Ibid., 49.
140 British etchings were displayed with “Engravings” in Memorial Hall, possibly on view in Gallery B, D, P, Q, R, S, T, or Z since the official catalogue does not specify the precise location of etched works. French etchings were displayed in Galleries 34, 36, and 45 of the Art Gallery Annex. A selection of seven reproductive etchings by artist William Unger (Austrian, 1837-1932) was displayed in Memorial Hall in either Gallery G or Z. See *United States Centennial Commission. International Exhibition. 1876 Official Catalogue. Part II. Art Gallery, Annexes, and Out-Door Works of Art*, 67, 79-81, and 91.
141 Schneider, 48-50.
142 Haden was one of seven artists who received an award for his etchings at the Centennial Exhibition. Wright, *Domestic and Wild*, 27 and 51, n. 32.
A watershed moment, the Centennial marked the beginning of a new era in American painting, sculpture, and printmaking; yet even as American art flourished, artists and critics continued to debate the benefits and disadvantages of European influences on American art. While many accepted and embraced foreign influences, others aggressively clung to a nationalist stance, criticizing artists who trained abroad and deriding them for their lack of “Americanness.” Despite the opposition to foreign styles, “they were fast becoming inextricably intertwined with American art, and after seeing the work of other countries at the Centennial Exhibition, many collectors and artists were ready to embrace them.”

It is critical to analyze the rise of painter-etching within the context of America’s post-Centennial art world: etching was an art with a European past – from the impressions of Rembrandt to the prints of Daubigny – and to “revive” it in the United States was to contribute to the advancement of European influences on American soil. Moreover, the medium’s ability to capture personal, spontaneous expression was in stark contrast to high-finish and careful detail that characterized the works of nativist artists. In the wake of the Centennial Exhibition, the growing interest in European art, notably French Barbizon painting, paved the way for the widespread acceptance of original etching. Moreover, given the international character of the etching “revival,” the medium offered American artists an opportunity to intervene in the international art world. In the two decades following the Centennial, “new world” painter-etchers proved themselves to be worthy inheritors of this “old world” tradition.

Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran were among the estimated ten million people who visited the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia between May 10 and November 10, 1876.

144 For an in depth discussion of these various points of view, see Ibid., 254-282.
145 Ibid., 251.
The exhibition was of particular significance to members of the Moran family, for not only did they attend the exhibition, but several of their works were also featured in the galleries of the United States art department. In addition to his original etchings, Peter Moran exhibited two oil paintings, while brothers Edward Moran and Thomas Moran exhibited four oil paintings each, including the latter’s *Hot Springs of the Yellowstone* (1872, Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and *Mountain of the Holy Cross* (1875, Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles). Thomas Moran also lent a watercolor and six drawings and brother John Moran displayed a series of landscape photographs.

Although Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran were living in Newark, New Jersey, in 1876, the couple did not miss the opportunity to attend the exhibition. In January 1876, *The Newark Daily Advertiser* reported: “Mr. Thomas Moran, the landscape painter, accompanied by his wife and three children, left Newark for a long visit to Philadelphia.”\(^{146}\) Moran’s exhibitor’s pass was punched on several occasions, indicating that he repeatedly visited the exhibition.\(^{147}\) Nimmo Moran undoubtedly accompanied her husband in order to view and study this international display of paintings, prints, and photographs. A decade prior, the couple had visited the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris; yet the Centennial offered the Morans a unique opportunity to examine an unprecedented display of American art – past and present – enabling both artists to take stock of their own accomplishments, while assessing future directions, influences, and opportunities.

The extensive display of prints at the Centennial Exhibition piqued the interest of many American artists, critics, and publishers. After the close of the exhibition, a New York-based art dealer purchased a set of Peter Moran’s etchings, which he published as a portfolio. Wray

\(^{146}\) *Newark Daily Advertiser* (January 26, 1876) quoted in Anderson, 214.

\(^{147}\) Moran’s exhibitor’s pass, currently in the collection of the Gilcrease Museum, is reproduced in Ibid., 215.
asserted that these prints were “the first painter-etchings, of any pretention, ever purchased outright by a noted publisher in this country…Encouraged by the prospect of substantial support, artists now put aside their brushes, to devote themselves to this newly revived art.”

Although this statement oversimplifies the complex factors motivating etching’s “revival” in the United States, commercial viability played an important role in popularizing the medium with American artists. Peter Moran’s early success and recognition – professionally and financially – set an important example for his brother Thomas Moran and sister-in-law Mary Nimmo Moran, who pursued etching in the years immediately following the exhibition.

In addition to the international display of original etchings at the Centennial, the movement to promote the medium in America received another important stimulus in 1876 when Hamerton’s *Etching and Etchers* was first published in the United States. As in England, the treatise was widely popular with artists, critics, and the general public. Hitchcock deemed it “no exaggeration to say that the modern revival of etching has been due very largely to this book,” for it was “read from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and it has dawned upon many readers that a liking for etchings is an evidence of a refined and cultivated taste.”

Hamerton’s treatise had a lasting impact on American art critics, most notably Koehler – the “revival’s” most prominent and dedicated advocate in the United States. In 1879, Koehler founded *The American Art Review* and served as the journal’s editor during its two-year publication run from November 1879 to October 1881. Art historian H. Barbara Weinberg has described the journal as “one of the most

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148 Although Wray claims that these prints were the “first painter-etchings of any pretention, ever purchased outright by a noted publisher in this country,” Weitenkampf later noted that the “Publication of etchings was undertaken here [in the United States] much earlier…Emil Seitz has been named, and Hitchcock records that F.B. Patterson (who secured plates and tools and endeavored to interest such artists as C.S. Reinhart and E.A. Abbey) ‘began to deal in portfolios of French etchings soon after the Cadart exhibition,’ and issued a portfolio of Farrer’s New York views in 1872.” Wray, 59-60 and Weitenkampf, 10. Details pertaining to the publication of Peter Moran’s print portfolio remain unclear and no intact surviving example is known to exist. Wright, *Domestic and Wild*, 51, n. 40.

149 Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Etching and Etchers* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876).

150 Hitchcock, 29 and 60.
serious and ambitious products of awakening art awareness in America in the years after the Centennial Exhibition” and it played a crucial role in stimulating interest in the painter-etcher movement among American artists and collectors.\textsuperscript{151}

In the introduction to the inaugural issue of The American Art Review, Koehler explained the impetus behind the journal’s publication:

An especially noteworthy sign of artistic progress in this country is the steady development of the art of etching. The publication of a series of plates by American etchers in the Review will, as we hope, aid in fostering the growth of this peculiarly painters’ art, which, though born in the seventeenth century, may, by reason of its remarkable revival in our own day, be regarded as equally the child of the nineteenth.\textsuperscript{152}

Similar to Cadart’s \textit{Eaux-fortes modernes}, Koehler’s pioneering periodical included examples of original etchings, which he published in a series of twenty-six articles titled “The Works of the American Etchers.”\textsuperscript{153} Each installment showcased the prints of an American painter-etcher and included biographical information, a general overview of the artist’s oeuvre, and at least one original etching – several of which were commissioned specially for the publication. According to Koehler, the series was intended to “furnish abundant material to those who desire to follow the development of the art [of etching] in our own country.”\textsuperscript{154} In March 1881, he published the twentieth installment in the series, introducing readers to the original prints of “Mrs. M. Nimmo Moran.”\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{153} In addition to the twenty-six installments of “The Works of the American Etchers,” Koehler published six follow-up articles presenting readers with new etchings by artists Henry Farrer (March 1881); James D. Smillie (June 1881); Thomas Moran (July 1881); Peter Moran (August 1881); Kruseman van Elten (September 1881); and Otto Bacher (October 1881).
CHAPTER 4: ETCHING NEW PATHS

Pursuing Etching: The Fallacy of Leisure

In an unpublished biographical manuscript, Ruth Moran described the circumstances surrounding her mother’s first experiments with etching: “In 1879 when [Thomas] Moran was about to start for a trip to Mexico [sic] and his wife having decided to remain at home, he left with her several copper plates coated with wax, thinking she might like to try her hand at etching during his absence.”\(^1\) Mary Nimmo Moran’s etching “origin story” first appeared in print in the July 1888 issue of *The Art Stationer* in which critic A. De Montigu explained:

In 1879, Mr. Moran contemplating another tour through that region of the county [the West], his wife decided to remain at home. Before his departure, Mr. Moran coated several plates, advising his wife to employ her leisure moments in etching them. These first attempts were necessarily experimental, as Mrs. Moran possessed but scant knowledge of the art of etching, and her husband being absent, she was unassisted by his advice and experience. The work was done for the purpose of recreation and with but little expectation of being successful.\(^2\)

The notion that Nimmo Moran leisurely pursued etching as a recreational pastime has gone unchallenged in the minimal literature on the artist. A critic writing in *The East Hampton Star* noted that, “Before his departure Mr. Moran coated several plates and suggested to his wife to employ her leisure moments in attempting the then new art of etching upon copper. Mrs. Moran smiled and said she knew nothing about etching but would experiment with the plates merely as a recreation.”\(^3\) In 1901, critic Morris T. Everett editorialized the story, explaining that when “Mr. Moran decided to make another extended tour of the West…his wife wisely decided to remain at home. This was the beginning of her interest in etching…She had little knowledge of the art, only such as she had picked up by seeing her husband at work, and she thus began her

\(^1\) Ruth Moran, “Mary Nimmo Moran,” typed manuscript, undated, page 5, A 59, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.


\(^3\) “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
career as an etcher without advice and experience. It was primarily the enterprise of recreation, and neither Mrs. Moran nor her husband had any hope of ultimate success.”

Critic Frances Benson similarly remarked upon Nimmo Moran’s low self-esteem, writing that it “seemed utterly absurd to her to attempt it [etching] in the absence of her teacher.” Ruth Moran later reaffirmed this perception of her mother, recounting that in 1879 Thomas Moran “came to her with five beautifully coated plates. ‘See here, Mary, you etch these while I am away.’ ‘Very well,’ she said. ‘I know nothing about etching, as you well know, but I will present you five well-scratched plates when you come back, Tom; five good copper plates spoiled.’”

Together these written descriptions – of which this is an edited, yet representative selection – construct a specific persona for Nimmo Moran: she is the dutiful wife who follows her husband’s instructions and pursues etching as a leisurely way to occupy her free time.

Although seemingly harmless, these accounts erase the artist’s own agency, and self-deprecating comments such as “five good copper plates spoiled” undermine the seriousness with which she pursued etching – and art making more generally – throughout her career. Moreover, by emphasizing Moran’s role, critics have essentially credited him for her engagement with the medium and she emerges from this narrative as nothing more than an obedient pupil whose success was inextricably tied to her master. While it would be inaccurate to assert that Moran played no role in encouraging his wife to etch, he was certainly not the only influence motivating her pursuit of the medium.

Nimmo Moran’s account of her initial interest in etching is far more candid: “In 1879 my husband going on an expedition to the then unexplored Yellowstone Country advised my taking

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up Etching during his absence and during that summer I etched six plates taking them directly to nature and working entirely out of doors.”7 Women artists, especially those who were married to male artists, were often required to negotiate the personal and psychological implications of their success by playing the role of pupil and thus maintaining proper gender hierarchies in their relationships. While Nimmo Moran acknowledged that her husband advised her “taking up etching” – thus reinforcing her status as his pupil – she does not suggest that she pursued the medium as a recreational pastime.

Scholars who have perpetuated this fallacy of leisure and female amateurism have failed to consider important socio-historical circumstances that encouraged American and European women to etch professionally. I believe that Nimmo Moran’s pursuit of etching was a conscious and calculated decision made by, rather than for, the artist. Her rise to prominence as a professional painter-etcher reflects not only her artistic talent and technical skill, but also the changing status of women printmakers in the art world.

**Women Etchers in the United States**

Women have played an important role in the history of etching and were among the earliest practitioners of the medium in the United States.8 Sarah Cole, sister of landscape painter Thomas Cole, is believed to be the first female etcher in America: she learned the process from Asher B. Durand and produced at least four plates in 1844.9 Twenty-four years later, Eliza

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9 At the time of the 1888 *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* held at the Union League Club, New York, Sarah Cole’s plates were owned by American painter-etcher John M. Falconer. Although entry number sixty-five of the exhibition’s catalogue reads, “Cole (Miss). / (Deceased.) Sister of the late Thomas Cole. / Proofs of plates etched in 1844,” an exhibition review published in *The Critic* reveals that her prints were not included in the exhibition: “The first of the women-etchers of America, the sister of Thomas Cole, is not represented, as Dr. Purdy [an exhibition organizer] was unable to procure the prints from the owner of the four plates, Mr. Falconer of
Greatorex etched her first plate entitled *The Pass of St. Gotthard*, which she displayed at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1868. Before the rise of the etching “revival,” American women etchers – like their male contemporaries – worked primarily in isolation. Yet after the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, women pursued etching with the same fervor as their male colleagues and they were an integral part of the movement from its inception.

The influence and prominence of the female painter-etcher in America’s art world was recognized as early as 1887, when critic and curator Sylvester Rosa Koehler organized the *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The show featured 413 prints by twenty-five women artists and was expanded the following year to include 509 etchings by thirty-five women artists when it traveled to the Union League Club, New York. In the catalogue that accompanied the Boston exhibition, Koehler declared that, “An exhibition made up entirely of the work of women needs hardly to be introduced to-day with words of excuse or explanation. Whatever may be thought of the movement in favor of ‘the emancipation of woman,’ it must be admitted that it is a sign of the times which cannot be ignored.” Moreover, he contended that, “never before and nowhere else has etching been practised [sic] by female hands as enthusiastically and as assiduously as in America.”

Critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer echoed Koehler’s sentiment in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition in New York:


11 The Boston catalogue lists 388 etchings by twenty-three women artists; however, the exhibition included an additional twenty-four etchings, drypoints, and aquatints by Mary Cassatt and one etching by Mrs. Lucia Gray Sweet Alexander, which were added to the exhibition after the catalogue was printed. Phyllis Peet, *American Women of the Etching Revival* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1988), 9.

12 Koehler, Introduction to *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* (Boston), 3.
It would be a singularly incomplete collection of American etchings that should contain no plates with a feminine signature. They would need to be included in the very smallest and choicest portfolio that could be gathered; and if we put Mr. Whistler’s name aside…and think of a list of American etchers ranged with strict regard to the virile excellence of their productions, we can easily imagine that a woman’s name might lead all the others.13

The success and advancement of women painter-etchers in the United States over the course of just eleven years – from the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 to the Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America in 1887 – is nothing short of remarkable. A critic reviewing the latter exhibition for The Boston Evening Transcript noted that,

When the announcement was made that a special exhibition of the work of the women etchers of America would be held at the Museum of Fine Arts, a good many people must have been surprised to think that there could be enough of that sort of thing to make an exhibition of. Their wonder at it will not be less than when they see two rooms full of etchings and learn that the oldest of the lot does not date farther back than 1869…The exhibition of the women etchers certainly shows the astonishing results of so few years’ endeavor.14

In terms of quantity and quality, their etched impressions rivaled those of their male contemporaries, whom they successfully challenged for exhibition space, critical recognition, and commercial sales.

Sociologists Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang have documented four primary ways that an artist of the era could learn to etch: “through formal instruction, either in the workshop or in a professional school; informal instruction in the medium by networking with other artists; or self instruction, usually with the help of a manual.”15 The educational path pursued by a given artist was not random since, as the Langs note, “not all entry points were equally open to everyone at

every point in time. Rather the pattern of initiation [into etching] was a function of gender, generation, and nationality.”

While men were primarily self-taught or trained in workshops, social restrictions prohibited women from entering into apprenticeships. As a result, female artists most often sought formal instruction in the classroom. Prior to 1850, such instruction was not widely available and women who excelled as printmakers – including American artists Emily Sartain and Catherine, Emily, Maria, and Octavia Maverick – were born into printmaking families, learning to engrave, etch, and cut woodblocks from their fathers and brothers.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, family workshops provided women with their first opportunities to train and work as printmakers. However, as art historian Helena E. Wright notes, “after about 1850 the process of industrialization removed paid work from the household economy…the range of work women had performed in family shops didn’t survive the transition, but new educational opportunities and the expansion of the printing industry in the coming decades ultimately opened more jobs to women artists.” As outlined in Chapter One, the formation of women’s design schools, as well as new education initiatives within the nation’s established art academies provided aspiring female artists with the formal training necessary to excel as professionals. In addition to drawing, painting, and sculpture, art schools began offering courses in printmaking, notably wood engraving and lithography.

Prior to 1880, wood engraving provided female artists with the most dependable source of income, although many women also found employment in lithography shops delineating and coloring lithographs. After 1880, women pursued etching and photography, as the two processes

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16 Lang and Lang, 154.
18 Ibid., 5.
surpassed wood engraving and lithography in the production of reproductive and original prints. By the mid-1880s, American design schools, including the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and the New York School of Design for Women introduced etching into their curriculum to provide female students with formal training in the medium.

Although formal instruction was the primary means by which women learned to etch, it was not the only method. Between 1870 and 1879, fifty-eight women (from a sample of 210 female etchers studied by the Langs) learned the process through informal or self-instruction. Many informally- or self-taught women etchers were previously trained in another branch of art, such as drawing or painting. Art historian Phyllis Peet notes that “by the 1870s women were experimenting with etching as an extension of their drawing and painting skills...Many women who were attracted to painting for a career in art took up etching, usually in relation to their opportunities to learn it.”

The Langs describe such women as “lateral entrants,” defined as artists “who were essentially self-taught in the medium or who learned the essentials in a more informal setting with the help of friends or colleagues [and they] were almost always already well along in their professional careers.” Amidst these “lateral entrants” were several “converts,” who “crossed over from a related career field or took up etching after having built a reputation in another artistic medium. The motives behind such crossovers could be either expressive – the learning of etching as an end in itself – or instrumental – as a means of fulfilling some other purpose, such as supplementing income.” Upon discovering etching, many women were “enchanted by the ease with which they could run the needle over the blackened surface of the copper plate. Nothing,

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19 This number fell to thirty-nine women between 1880 and 1889, as opportunities for formal instruction became increasingly available. See Table 7.2 in Lang and Lang, 156.
21 Lang and Lang, 166.
except perhaps lithography, could better serve the skilled draftsman as a means of direct expression.”

Etching’s close association with drawing made the print process a suitable one for women to pursue. By the 1870s, drawing was a regular component of upper- and middle-class women’s education and etching was perceived a logical extension of a woman’s ability to draw.

Despite the hands-on, manual labor that goes into producing an etching, critics typically downplayed the “dirty,” chemical aspects of the medium. Instead, etching was described as a process requiring patience and devotion – qualities believed to be inherently feminine. British critic Martin Hardie emphasized this point, arguing that women were naturally predisposed to succeed as etchers:

Of all the varied branches of art, few could appeal to feminine sympathy with stronger claim [than etching]. It is an art that requires lithe, supple, pliant fingers, a firm yet sensitive touch – the ‘light hand’ that figures in another sphere of woman’s work. It is an elusive, baffling, subtle art. The copperplate seems to become a sentient thing – of whims and fancies; it is uncertain, coy, and hard to please as woman herself; it calls for humoring and light caresses. It is an art that requires patience and self-control, a close attendance upon petty trifles, during the slow biting of the acid, the re-grounding and re-working, the elimination of this detail, the addition of that, the burnishing of a stubborn line…It is an art in which woman is destined to excel.

Although Hardie’s statements are laden with gender prejudices, the sentiment that women were “destined to excel” as etchers opened the door for artists such as Nimmo Moran to pursue the medium professionally.

Moreover, etching’s perceived status a secondary or “little” medium, inferior to both painting and sculpture in the hierarchy of fine arts, provided further justification for women’s engagement with the medium. Female painter-etchers – even successful professional ones –

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22 Lang and Lang, 167.
24 In addition to etching, watercolor, pastel, wood engraving, and ivory miniature painting were among the other “little” media popular in the United States post-Civil War. Art historians Sarah Burns and John Davis have argued that the increased interest in small-scale, intimate works was in reaction to the monumental, bombastic paintings produced by the previous generation of American artists, including Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt. Burns and Davis write, “The little media energized the American artistic community, but perhaps no less important were the
were far less threatening to the status quo than female painters and sculptors. Art historians Sarah Burns and John Davis aptly note that, “The small scale of the ‘little media’ meant that they were often associated with the feminine, and this is particularly true of etching. The number of important American etchers who were women far exceeds the percentage of recognized female painters.” In the male-dominated arenas of painting and sculpture, women often struggled to compete for exhibition space, critical attention, commissions, and commercial sales. Etching, however, offered a much more even playing field: there were far fewer aesthetic conventions to work within and far more opportunities for women to exhibit, publish, and sell their impressions.

Etching’s inherent multiplicity enabled artists to easily disseminate examples of their works to critics, colleagues, and collectors. This was especially significant for women artists who were often excluded from art clubs and societies, and thus denied the networking benefits of such groups. Women could circulate their etchings with relative ease, which increased their visibility in the art world and helped raise public awareness of their work. Multiple etched impressions also permitted multiple sales and etching’s commercial viability played an important role in attracting practitioners – both male and female. By the early 1880s, etching’s aesthetic and commercial popularity offered women artists a respectable means by which to earn a living and build a professional reputation. It is within this context that we must consider Mary Nimmo Moran’s pursuit of the medium beginning in 1879.

An already well-established illustrator and painter, Nimmo Moran falls into the Langs’ category of “lateral entrant” or perhaps more precisely of “convert” – an artist who “crossed over from a related career field or took up etching after having built a reputation in another artistic

increased opportunities for sales and the cultivation of new patrons who had been formerly disinclined (or unable) to purchase expensive oil paintings.” On the growing popularity of “little” media, including watercolor, pastel, etching, and wood engraving, see Sarah Burns and John Davis, *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 869-896.
25 Ibid., 889.
The factors motivating her crossover were complex and manifold: while previous accounts have emphasized her recreational interest in the medium, I believe that aesthetic interests, practical concerns, and professional ambitions played a far more influential role.

The portability of the coated copper plate appealed to Nimmo Moran’s preference for working out of doors. As Ruth Moran noted, her mother’s “favorite studio was beneath the spreading boughs of some hospitable tree and the broad face of Nature supplying her with grand and ever beautiful subjects which were mirrored with the utmost fidelity in the sheet of copper which with her supplied the place of the painter’s canvas.” The Langs also note that, “one great advantage of etching over…oil paint was that it did not necessitate the toting about of bulky gear when drawing outdoors.” The ease of etching en plein air combined with the medium’s historical association with the genre of landscape – from the works of Rembrandt to Daubigny – undoubtedly initiated her interest in the medium.

Furthermore, etching was esteemed for its ability to capture quick, spontaneous expression. Nimmo Moran – similar to other women artists of the era – had found it increasingly difficult to devote the time necessary to complete large-scale oil paintings. Etching resolved these practical challenges, as its small scale and sketch-like aesthetic enabled her to be far more productive as an etcher than she had previously been as a painter. Moreover, by printing several impressions from one plate, she could reach a wider audience through exhibitions, publications, and commercial sales. Etching ultimately offered the artist the opportunity to explore her artistic interests and achieve widespread, professional success. As a result, she pursued the medium with great commitment and dedication over the course of the 1880s.

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26 Lang and Lang, 166.
28 Lang and Lang, 167.
Emily Kelley Moran: An Early Example of Success

Critics such Everett and De Montaigu emphasized that Nimmo Moran had “scant” or “little” knowledge of etching prior to executing her first plate in the summer 1879. Such assertions must be discredited, however, since the artist was familiar with the process and had been exposed to examples of contemporary etchings on several prior occasions. For instance, in 1878, Moran installed an etching press in the couple’s home-studio, executing five impressions that very year, and Nimmo Moran was certainly aware of her husband’s new work in the medium. She had also attended the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 and the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, both of which featured examples of French, English, and American etchings. Moreover, she knew the etchings of brother-in-law Peter Moran, who had received considerable attention for his prints at the Centennial, and sister-in-law Emily Kelley Moran, who began etching four years prior to Nimmo Moran’s experiments with the medium.

It has heretofore been presumed that Thomas Moran’s suggestion that his wife “try her hand at etching” was all the advice she needed to create her first plates. Yet the etchings of Emily Kelley Moran were an equally important influence motivating her pursuit of the medium. Born in Ireland in 1841, Emily Kelley’s family immigrated to the United States in 1856. She married Peter Moran in 1867 and began her artistic training shortly thereafter. Although few of her works survive today, exhibition records reveal that she etched her first original print in 1875 – one year after Peter Moran began working in the medium.

Kelley Moran made her professional debut in 1877, when she exhibited four etchings titled Views on the Schuylkill at the Forty-Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania

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29 Everett, 9 and De Montaigu, 4.
30 Unless otherwise indicated, all information pertaining to the biography and oeuvre of Emily Kelley Moran is from David G. Wright, “Emily Kelley Moran: Philadelphia’s Ground-Breaking Female Painter-Etcher,” Imprint 37, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 40-54.
One of the four prints (figure 4.1) contains two distinct landscape compositions on a single plate: above, she drew two figures on the banks of the Schuylkill River, which winds its way through the rolling hills of eastern Pennsylvania; below, she drew a pastoral scene featuring a herd of cattle wading in shallow water. Although the plate measures just 4 inches high by 4-1/2 inches wide, she was able to capture subtle nuances in the landscape by varying the depth, length, and texture of her etched line. Other prints in this series similarly depict life along the river, such as *Belmont on the Schuylkill* (figure 4.2), which features figures rowing single sculls and pedisterians walking along the quay. Her compositional arrangements are simple and straightforward, yet her direct and spontaneous touch embodies the sense of immediacy that defined the works of modern painter-etchers.

After exhibiting her original etchings at the Pennsylvania Academy, Kelley Moran displayed *Views on the Schuylkill* at the annual exhibition of the American Water Color Society held at the National Academy of Design in 1878. Her prints hung in the northwest gallery reserved for “Works in Black and White” alongside a selection of contemporary prints by American and European painter-etchers, including Peter Moran, R. Swain Gifford, Henry Farrer, Francis Seymour Haden, and James McNeill Whistler. Although there is no documentation to definitively confirm that Nimmo Moran attended the exhibition, it is certainly likely since Thomas Moran was a member of the American Water Color Society. However, if Nimmo Moran did not attend the exhibition, then she was certainly aware that the recent etchings of her

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31 The exhibition catalogue incorrectly attributes these four prints to Peter Moran. David Wright, *Domestic and Wild: Peter Moran’s Images of America* (Baltimore: Creo Press, 2010), 29.
32 Earlier artists, most notably Rembrandt, are known to have etched more than one image on a single plate, often treating the plate as a page in a drawing book on which to compile multiple images. See, for example, Rembrandt, *Sheet with Two Studies: A Tree and the Upper Part of a Head of Rembrandt Wearing a Velvet Cap* (n.d., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).
34 For a complete list of the works exhibited in the gallery of “Works in Black and White,” see cat. nos. 448-559 in *Illustrated Catalogue of the Eleventh Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society*, 24-28.
sister-in-law were on view in New York. The success with which Kelley Moran executed and exhibited her original etchings had a lasting impact on Nimmo Moran. There are no surviving letters between the two women, but given their close familial ties and their shared interest in the landscape, it is more than likely that they communicated about art, perhaps even confiding in one another about the challenges of pursuing professional careers in the shadows of their husbands.

**Summer 1879**

In the summer 1879, Thomas Moran embarked on another western excursion, traveling with Peter Moran to the Sierra Nevada, Lake Tahoe, Salt Lake City, and the Snake River in Idaho. On the East Coast, Nimmo Moran – armed with her coated copper plates – traveled with her three children from Newark, New Jersey, to Easton, Pennsylvania, where they stayed from late July to early September. She had spent at least two previous summers in Easton, visiting family and drawing the surrounding landscape. Since Peter Moran was also traveling out west, it is possible that Emily Kelley Moran visited her sister-in-law in Easton, which was easily accessible by train from her home in Philadelphia (approximately seventy miles to the south).

If Kelley Moran visited Easton that summer, then the notion that Nimmo Moran began etching “unassisted” and “without advice” would be inaccurate since she would have certainly solicited guidance from her sister-in-law who had then been etching for four years. While I am not currently able to confirm Kelley Moran’s presence in Easton that summer, the strength and

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36 I have based the length of Nimmo Moran’s stay in Easton on her dated sketches from this summer, the first of which was executed on July 22, 1879 (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.1) and the last of which was executed on September 6, 1879 (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.13). Thomas Moran’s final sketch from his summer excursion out west is dated September 12, 1879 (George F. McMurray Collection at Trinity College, Hartford). Nimmo Moran was certainly back in Newark to meet her husband upon his return home.

37 In addition to the works executed in Easton in 1873 (and discussed in detail in Chapter Two), I have located one drawing inscribed “Bushkill / Aug 21st 1875” (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.19) indicating that the artist returned to Easton on at least one occasion between 1873 and 1879.
success of Nimmo Moran’s early etchings make a strong case for the fact that she received informal training or counsel prior to running her needle over a grounded copper plate.

In 1889, the Christian Klackner Gallery, located at 5 East 17th Street in New York City, mounted an exhibition of 128 etchings by Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran. The show was the most comprehensive display of Nimmo Moran’s work and included the only known impression of her first etching *The St. John’s River, Florida* (1879, figure 4.3). Although the plate is now lost, one extant impression is currently in the collection of the Gilcrease Museum. Affixed to the matte is the label printed for Klackner’s exhibition, which reads: “First experiment. Etched on the back of a visiting card plate.” Ruth Moran explained that her mother executed this work “not wishing to ruin the [other five] plates” that Thomas Moran left her.

It is common practice for first-time etchers to experiment on a small piece of copper when learning to clean, ground, draw, bite, and print a plate. In his introductory chapter to the authorized American edition of Maxime Lalanne’s *A Treatise on Etching*, Sylvester Rosa Koehler advised readers “not [to] waste your money on a large plate. A visiting-card plate is sufficiently large. If you happen to have an engraved plate of that kind, you can use the back of it.” Ruth Moran recalled her mother working on the back of her visiting card plate, writing that

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39 This impression is believed to be the only proof pulled from the plate before it was lost. The etching was exhibited in the *Exhibition of the Work of Women Etchers of America* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Union League Club, New York. A note in each exhibition catalogue indicates that this was “First experiment. Only proof in existence. Plate lost.” Cat. no. 256 in *Exhibition of the Work of Women Etchers of American* (Boston), 20 and cat. no. 340 in *Exhibition Catalogue of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* (New York), 17.
she “took her card plate, ‘coated’ that herself, and made some wriggles – as she said – for a tree, a few lovely lines for water, and there it was. It was enough.”

Measuring 1-7/8 inches high by 4-1/4 inches wide, this experimental test plate depicts a scene drawn from memory of the St. John’s River in Florida, which she visited two years prior. Three small boats manned by rudimentarily outlined figures are visible in the foreground; the boats’ hulls cast reflections on the surface of the water, which she depicts through a series of quickly drawn, swirling lines. On the distant riverbank, buildings peak through the trees, the leaves of which are rendered with simple hatching and cross-hatching. To the left, a thinly etched line delineates the horizon, creating a clear division between water and sky. Ruth Moran noted that after drawing the plate and “biting it with acid,” her mother “took one impression only; but the result was so encouraging to her that she continued and used up all the prepared plates.”

Although the Morans had an etching press in their Newark studio, to bite and print the plate in Easton, Nimmo Moran must have had the necessary equipment on hand, including a printing press. Since she initially worked out of doors and with small plates, she likely purchased a portable press. Invented by Philip Gilbert Hamerton, “miniature presses” were widely available in 1879. In fact, Hamerton promoted the convenience of such presses in his 1876 edition of *Etching and Etchers*: “I invented a miniature press, which may be carried anywhere, and will give good proofs…My object was to contrive a miniature and very portable affair, which an etcher might put in his box when travelling, and use anywhere, in an inn, in a friend’s house, or even out of doors when etching from nature.”

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43 Ruth Moran, “Mary Nimmo Moran,” typed manuscript, undated, page 5, A 59, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection. Although Ruth Moran notes that the image on the back of this card-plate was of the “Bridge over the Delaware at Easton, Pennsylvania,” the image etched on the card-plate was Nimmo Moran’s *The St. John’s River, Florida* (figure 4.3). *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.11) was the third plate that she etched in the summer 1879.
44 Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Etching and Etchers* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), 415-416.
Both Hamerton and Koehler encouraged artists to print their own proofs: in *The Etcher’s Handbook*, Hamerton insisted that, “every etcher ought to print his own proofs, to learn the state of his plate” and Koehler later noted that, “it would be a great advantage if every etcher could print his own proofs. Rembrandt is the most striking example, as he was the author of many of the [printing] devices in use even to-day. A press can be easily procured.”45 Beginning with her first experimental test plate, printing played an important role in Nimmo Moran’s etching practice and she continued to print her own impressions throughout her career.

Ruth Moran was only nine years old at the time, but she later recognized the significance of this moment in her mother’s career. She recalled that after successfully drawing, biting, and printing *The St. John’s River, Florida*, Nimmo Moran “took next day a child in one hand and a plate in the other…and sat her down by the side of ‘The Old Bridge Over the Delaware.’ I remember the excitement of her, though I was a very little child at the time. Some critics of her work consider this plate as good as any that she has done.”46 The etching that Ruth Moran refers to as “The Old Bridge Over the Delaware” was exhibited and published under the title *Bridge over the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.4) and it was one of two plates that Nimmo Moran etched of Easton’s landscape that summer – the other titled *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.11).47 Both works were executed *en plein air*, as the artist recalled taking her

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47 When Ruth Moran identified this etching as “The Old Bridge Over the Delaware,” she was writing forty-five years after her mother executed the work and likely confused the order of execution and titles of the two prints. A lifetime inventory of the artist’s etched oeuvre, as well as multiple exhibition catalogues confirm that *Bridge over the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.4) was Nimmo Moran’s second etched work and *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.11) was her third etched work. See “Catalogue of Etchings by M. Nimmo Moran. Member of the New York Etching Club & The Society of Painter Etchers of London, Eng.,” January 1, 1881, A 63, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection; cat. nos. 2 and 3 in Klackner, 17; cat. nos. 257 and 258 in *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of American* (Boston), 20; and cat. nos. 341 and 342 in *Exhibition Catalogue of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* (New York), 17.
plates “directly to nature and working entirely out of doors.” This practice distinguishes her prints from those of her husband, who preferred to compose his etchings in the studio.

A series of pencil sketches dating to July, August, and September 1879 reveal that Nimmo Moran spent several weeks drawing the landscape around Easton, Pennsylvania, executing preparatory studies for finished etchings and watercolors. In her Easton sketches of 1873, she drew expansive views of the Delaware River framed by mountains and trees, as well as forest interiors. However, in 1879, she turned her attention to a new motif: bridges. Of the fourteen surviving pencil sketches dating from this summer, eight feature bridges, including arch bridges, beam bridges, and covered bridges that span the Delaware River and Bushkill Creek.

In one sketch, executed on July 29, 1879, Nimmo Moran drew an old stone bridge arching over the Bushkill (1879, figure 4.5). Framing the scene on the left is one of the many mills that lined the creek, most likely a sawmill, as several logs are visible under the bridge on the far shore. Industrial development along Bushkill Creek, which began in the late eighteenth century, intensified in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the creek served as an important source of power for several sawmills, gristmills, silk mills, and distilleries.

This sketch served as the preparatory drawing for her etching Bridge over the Bushkill, Easton, Pa. (figure 4.4) and the two works may have been executed on the same day. The etching, however, is a mirror image of the sketch, an indication that she was in fact working out

49 In 1881, Mary Nimmo Moran exhibited two watercolors titled On the Bushkill Creek, Easton, Pa. and Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa. in the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society. Although the exhibition catalogue does not provide dates for these two works, they were likely based on sketches executed in the summer 1879. I have not yet located either watercolor. Cat. nos. 204 and 286 in Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society (New York: The Society, 1881), 15 and 20.
50 Nimmo Moran drew at least three additional views of industrial development along Bushkill Creek in the summer 1879, including Trees, Stream, and Cow, Aug. 21, 1879 (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.24), Landscape Sketches, Sept. 1879 (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.12), and Easton, Sept. 6, 1879 (Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.13). The two former works feature buildings and a smokestack on the water; the latter work features a mill and a bridge, and served as a preparatory study for her etching A Willowy Brook, Easton, Pa. (1881, Gilcrease Museum, 1426.83A).
of doors: drawing the scene before her as she saw it, the composition was then reversed in the printing process.\textsuperscript{51} Although this was just her “second experiment in etching,” Klackner noted that, “her advance is shown in it in the confidence of her line, almost worthy of an experienced etcher.”\textsuperscript{52} Throughout the plate, she varied her etched line to recreate different textures and materials: short, choppy scrawls for the foliage; dense hatching and cross-hatching for the stone bridge; and free, wispy “wriggles,” as she called them, for the reflections on the water. A detail of the print’s lower left corner (figure 4.6) reveals the autographic quality of her line, which takes on the look of illegible handwriting – or \textit{gribouillage}, as it was described by French critics of the era. Her mark making is distinctive and idiosyncratic, and over the course of her career she continued to develop the personal style that one first discerns in the lines of \textit{Bridge over the Bushkill}. This detail also reveals the quickness and spontaneity of her on-the-spot execution, and it appears she drew this area of the plate without pausing to lift the needle from grounded copper.

I have documented nine extant impressions of this plate, for which there is only one known state.\textsuperscript{53} Rather than making permanent adjustments to the matrix, Nimmo Moran experimented with different approaches to inking, wiping, and printing – a means by which she could ensure the originality of each impression. In figure 4.4, the artist employed what Lalanne and Hamerton defined as “natural printing”: after heating the plate and applying ink with a dabber, she wiped the surface of the plate clean – first with a coarse muslin rag, often referred to as a printers’ canvas, and then with the palm of her hand to ensure, as Lalanne wrote, “that no

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{51} The artist signed the plate “M.M. 1879,” which appears in reverse in lower right corner.
\textsuperscript{52} Klackner, 17.
\textsuperscript{53} The definition of a “state” has evolved over time. In 1868, Hamerton explained that after drawing on the plate and submerging it for the necessary time in the acid, “you put the plate in a bath of pure turpentine, which dissolves both the varnish and the ground, and you have the plate in what is technically known as \textit{the first state}.” Any deliberate and permanent changes made to the plate – also known as the matrix – through etching or drypoint results in a subsequent state of the plate. Only when Nimmo Moran made changes to the matrix and pulled impressions from the intentionally altered plate will I consider it to be a second, third, fourth, etc. state. Philip Gilbert Hamerton, \textit{Etching and Etchers} (London: MacMillian & Co., 1868), 326.
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ink is left on it anywhere but in the lines.”

Hamerton explained that in order “to ascertain the exact state of a plate it is necessary to clean it all over, leaving no ink except what is in the lines…It is a good thing to do this for the first proof simply for self-information.” Once wiped clean, the plate was run through the press against a moistened piece of paper, which absorbed the ink and resulted in a “natural proof.” Each line is printed exactly as it was etched into the copper plate: areas of tone and shadow, seen in the arch’s vault and its reflection upon the water, were created through linear hatching and cross-hatching with little or no ink manipulation.

In contrast to the “natural printing” of figure 4.4, Nimmo Moran produced several impressions (figures 4.7-4.10), using “artistic printing” – also known as “artificial printing” – defined by Hamerton as the process “in which the smooth surface of the copper between the lines is itself more or less charged with printing-ink. This is done to enhance the work by giving a rich and soft obscurity to certain parts of the work.” Lalanne wrote extensively on “artificial printing,” noting that “the printing of etchings very frequently differs from the simple method [of natural printing]…It must be varied according to the style of execution adopted by the etcher; and, as much of the harmony of the plate may depend upon it, it sometimes rises to the dignity of an art, in which the artist and the printer are merged into each other.”

Attitudes toward “artistic” or “artificial printing” were mixed and changed over time. In 1871, Hamerton argued:

There are two kinds of printing, artificial and natural. Artificial printing is resorted to to sustain weak portions of a plate which has not been brought into harmony by the etcher;
natural printing consists simply in filling all the lines with printing ink and cleaning quite perfectly the spaces of smooth copper between them. An etcher who prints need never trouble himself about artificial printing at all, for what he requires is to know the real condition of his plate, not to conceal or counterbalance its deficiencies.  

Five years later, he reconsidered his position, writing that, “Artificial or artistic printing has often been much disliked by artists, because when badly done it is intolerable. Mr. Ruskin condemns it altogether…I too have had my time of rebellion against it, caused by ignorant and tasteless work which pretended to be artistic…The plain truth is, that when done with ability, skill, and taste, artistic printing is a wonderful help to certain etching.”

By the late 1870s, many noteworthy etchers working in France, England, and the United States practiced “artistic printing,” pushing the conventional boundaries of the medium and blurring traditional distinctions between painting and printmaking. Lalanne noted that “the great majority [of etchers] favor the other [artificial] method of printing, which, for the very reason that it is difficult, and on account of the many variations in its application, ought always to be an object of interest to the printer, and the aim of his studies.” In *A Treatise on Etching*, Lalanne detailed several of these printing variations, including “Handwiping with Retroussage,” “Tinting with a Stiff Rag,” and “Wiping with the Rag only.” When effectively employed such “artifices,” as he described them, could create velvety lines, warm tints, and soft tones. Moreover, by combining techniques, varying the texture of the rag, or modifying the amount of pressure applied when wiping the plate, artists could experiment with a wide range of painterly effects, producing impressions that are distinct, expressive, and personal.

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60 Hamerton, *The Etcher’s Handbook*, 70-71. Hamerton’s attitudes reflect the influence of Francis Seymour Haden, who was staunchly opposed to artificial printing and ink manipulation with the exception of drypoint.  
62 Lalanne, 59.  
63 Ibid., 57-58.
Figures 4.7-4.10 (all of which were pulled from the same plate) reveal Nimmo Moran’s experiments with “artistic printing,” as she varied the inking and wiping of the plate from one impression to the next. In figure 4.7, which the artist labeled a “Trial Proof Print,” she adopted a method similar to what Lalanne described as “Wiping with the Rag Only.” Using either a stiff or soft muslin rag, she drew ink out of the etched lines spreading it onto the surface of the plate to create areas of depth and shadow. This is seen most notably in the foliage of the tress, where the drawn out ink creates a soft tint diffused over unetched areas of the plate in order to convey the appearance of lush, summertime vegetation.

She also used this technique to create velvety shadows on the water, as the ink appears to have been vigorously rubbed from left to right enveloping the etched lines in an inky haze. She contrasted these darker, inked areas of the Bushkill with bright highlights by strategically wiping passages of the plate entirely clean and thus allowing the white paper to shine through. Areas of ink and paper are subtly juxtaposed to recreate the shimmering effect of sunlight on water. Lalanne explained that the process of selectively wiping ink was done to “give the greatest amount of cleaning to the luminous passages, while a tolerably strong tint is left on the dark and deeply bitten ones.”

After producing this “Trial Proof Print,” Nimmo Moran pulled another very similar impression from the plate recreating the same tints, shadows, and highlights (figure 4.8). For this impression, however, she used a warmer shade of brown ink on ivory colored paper and engulfed the entire scene in soft plate tone. At first glance, the patterns of inking and wiping in figures 4.7 and 4.8 appear identical; yet upon close scrutiny, one can discern slight differences and

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64 Although this plate was etched in the summer 1879, impressions that exhibit experimental printing techniques may have been printed at a later date. Figures 4.7-4.10 are similar in printing style and technique to the artist’s etchings of 1881-1884, and she may have reprinted the plate to produce impressions that were more consistent with the expressive, painterly style that she developed in the early 1880s.

65 Lalanne, 58.
irregularities, seen for instance in the arch’s vault. In figure 4.8, ink fills the spaces between the etched lines, producing a tint that, as Lalanne noted, “is spread over the plate, and envelops the lines without obscuring them.” However, in figure 4.7, the vault was wiped more thoroughly, lifting ink from the plate’s surface and allowing the white paper to be seen. Since an etched plate has to be re-inked and re-wiped for each printing, it is nearly impossible for the human hand to exactly replicate expressive and painterly effects from one impression to the next. Although such differences are often only noticeable upon close inspection, they nevertheless underscore the handmade, one-of-a-kind quality of painter-etchings and contemporary connoisseurs delighted in discovering such idiosyncrasies from one impression to the next.

In addition to the slight printing disparities that result from human imprecision, Nimmo Moran produced impressions with intentional printing variations. In figure 4.9, her inking and wiping of the water differs significantly from other impressions: here she removed all but a thin layer of plate tone from the left foreground and cast the far shore in a shadowy tint. She also inked the foliage differently, wiping the plate clean around the trees beneath the bridge, creating a lighter, more open atmosphere in the middle of the composition.

The most expressive and painterly printing of this plate can be seen in figure 4.10, in which the artist pushed the boundaries of artificial printing, carrying what Lalanne described as “the effect of painting…into etching.” Rather than simply drawing ink out of the etched lines to create tints and shadows, she instead painted ink onto the surface of the plate, applying it with either a loaded rag or possibly a paintbrush. This technique is visible in her treatment of the sky and water: she rubbed ink along the top edge of the plate to evoke storm clouds, which in turn cast dark shadows on the surface of the Bushkill. To create this shadowy effect, she coated this

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66 Lalanne, 58.
67 Ibid.
area of the plate with a layer of ink, enveloping and obscuring her etched lines. Through this painterly approach to inking and wiping, she produced an impression that is not only unique and one-of-a-kind, but also exploratory and inventive, as she worked through the representational effects of light, weather, and atmosphere on the landscape.

Through ink manipulation, Nimmo Moran achieved substantial printing variations from one impression to the next. Her painterly prints are best described as monoprints – unique impressions created when an artist alters an already incised plate by adding ink or paint to the surface. In contrast to the monotype – a single print produced by applying ink or paint to a smooth, unmarked surface that is printed to transfer an image to a support – the monoprint process relies upon a matrix with permanent markings, such as an etched plate, which can be reused for subsequent printings. The monoprint allows an artist to explore variations on an image: art historian Kurt Wisneski explains that this process,

\[\text{...uses a plate or support that contains an artistically drawn, thus repeatable matrix image. Both the matrix and the surface of the plate can be used as a support to carry ink or paint, and after printing, the image is visible in the impression. In this way, the monoprint is a blend of two processes, the monotype and the print...By relying on the fixed matrix, an artist can strike a number of multiples, and subsequent to printing, alter each impression to make unique visual statements.}\]

Rembrandt produced some of the earliest known monoprints in the mid-1640s, often applying a thin film of ink, also known as plate tone, to his etching plates. Since plate tone must be reapplied for each printing, it can be dramatically altered from one impression to the next and Rembrandt often used the technique to experiment with the dramatic effects of

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70 While Rembrandt created monoprints in Amsterdam, his contemporary Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione produced the earliest known monotypes in Genoa. The two artists were apparently working entirely independent of one another. Sue Welsh Reed, “Monotypes in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in The Painterly Print, 3-6.
Wisneski notes that “Rembrandt’s creative wiping techniques…went against all established [printmaking] standards, and it seems only fitting that an artist who so deeply defined the Baroque tradition should have delved into such a naturally tonal process of effecting change on an intaglio image.”

Nineteenth-century critics such as Charles Blanc admired Rembrandt’s interpretative use of ink and encouraged contemporary artists to print their own plates in order to experiment with tonal techniques. Art historian Eugina Parry Janis argues that late-nineteenth-century painter-etchers effectively transformed painterly printmaking by “assigning ink immoderate importance.” Yet while many praised the development of “artificial printing,” others avoided tonal inking, fearing that it obscured and subverted the etched line. Haden, for instance, advocated against any etching that was not “naturally” printed, for he believed that tonal techniques were used to compensate for poorly etched plates: “The theory which supposes an arbitrary tint here, or a smudge there, or that it is any part of the business of the printer to eke out the effect left incomplete by the artist, is without foundation.”

Nevertheless, noteworthy printers and artists, including Auguste Delâtre, Vicomte Ludovic Lepic, and James McNeill Whistler “embraced the stylish gossamer of shade,” as Janis notes, and the nineteenth-century monoprint “took eccentric form: mavericks of the revival (professional printer, amateur, and painter alike) lavished ink on their plates and exaggerated inking and printing into a veritable cuisine. Justifiable only in part through Rembrandt’s

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71 Wisneski, 9.
72 Writing in the Gazette des Beaux Arts in 1861, Charles Blanc described Rembrandt’s strategic use of ink, explaining that “after having inked them [his plates] with a pad, he only half-wiped or wiped not at all those parts he wanted to remain muted; in other places where the burr no longer produced tone, he reestablished these artificial dusky markings by spreading on printer’s ink with his finger. Thus when Rembrandt appeared, the art was transformed. Engraving assumed an unexpected tonality; the print became a picture which instead of having been painted with oils was painted by etching.” Charles Blanc, “De la Gravure à l’eau forte, et des eaux-fortes de Jacque,” Gazette des Beaux Arts 9 (1861): 195 quoted Janis, 10.
73 Ibid., 11.
precedent of inventive daubing, ink in the hands of a significant minority became an impertinent sauce ‘hollandaise.’” More than any other artists of the era, Lepic pushed the boundaries of the monoprint through extensive ink manipulation. He described his practice as “eau-forte mobile” or “variable etching,” and in one instance, claimed to pull eighty-five different impressions from a single plate. On Lepic’s techniques and his influence on the development of the monotype in France, most notably on the works of Edgar Degas, see Janis, 18-23.

She argues that these artists constitute “a radical offshoot of the revival, but…few foresaw that ink’s new superfluity augured a revolutionary direction for printmaking,” namely the reemergence of the monotype.

Nimmo Moran is not known to have produced monotypes – in the strictest definition of the technique – yet her experimental approach to inking and printing her copper plates embodies the free, innovative spirit that characterized the process in the late nineteenth century. In the United States, the earliest known written description of a monotype was published in The Art Journal in November 1881, when a critic reporting on the recent works of artist Albion Harris Bicknell, wrote, “A.H. Bicknell has created some interest by his new process of drawing on copper and printing directly on Japanese paper without biting. The result seems to be similar to etching, but is described as broader and freer.” The following month, The Art Journal published a lengthier description of the process, explaining to readers that “its advantages lie in breadth and freedom in handling, in the possibilities of gradation, in the rendering of textures, and in the sense of atmosphere and color…To the possessors of such works the fact that each example is unique gives it an exceptional value.”

Breadth, freedom, gradation, texture, atmosphere, and color were all important features characterizing Nimmo Moran’s heavily inked, tonal etchings. Her printing techniques, which will be discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this dissertation, played a significant role in popularizing her prints with critics and collectors, many of who admired her bold and

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76 Ibid., 11.
painterly approach to the medium. Her monoprints, such as the varied impressions of *Bridge over the Bushkill*, should be recognized for their role in promoting the primacy of ink in the 1880s, which later reached its height in the monotypes of American artists such as Maurice Prendergrast, Robert Henri, and John Sloan.

The third etching that Nimmo Moran executed in the summer 1879 is titled *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (figure 4.11). As with *Bridge over the Bushkill*, this etching was preceded by a preparatory pencil study (figure 4.12), in which the artist loosely sketched out the etching’s compositional framework. However, unlike the preparatory study, the final etching features two bridges traversing the Delaware: bisecting the composition in the middle distance is a covered bridge with a timber truss and two stone piers designed in 1806 by American architect Timothy Palmer; visible through the arches of Palmer’s covered bridge is the Delaware River Bridge of the Lehigh Valley Railroad (LVRR). The latter bridge, built in 1854, was a double-decker wooden structure, yet in 1876 the original wooden framework was replaced by wrought-iron trusses, which create the geometric pattern of “X”s featured in Nimmo Moran’s print.

Our view of the updated railroad bridge is obscured by Palmer’s older structure, which would soon suffer the same fate as the LVRR’s double-decker wooden bridge. When trolley cars replaced horse cars at the end of the century, Palmer’s bridge could no longer sustain traffic and it was replaced by an iron structure in 1896.79 Nimmo Moran’s print privileges the older wooden traverse, documenting and preserving the bridge at the precise moment that such structures were being dismantled. The artist explored the juxtaposition of old and new, past and present in several of her pencil studies from the summer 1879. On July 23, she drew two bridges on a single sheet of paper (figure 4.13): above, she drew the historic Bushkill Bridge, a four-arched stone bridge traversing Bushkill Creek, framed on the left by a stone wall and on the right by a

79 The iron bridge still stands today and is known as the Northampton Street Bridge.
small stone building, possibly a mill; below, she drew the recently constructed Delaware River Bridge of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ), a wrought-iron, through-truss railroad bridge built to transport coal from western Pennsylvania to the Hudson River waterfront. She similarly contrasted two bridges – one historic, the other modern – in Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa. (figure 4.11). Despite her on-the-spot execution and close attention to architectural and natural details, the final image is not topographical.

In 1844, the German-born artist Augustus Köllner executed an ink and wash drawing of Palmer’s covered bridge (figure 4.14), capturing the confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers with the city of Easton visible on the left. In Köllner’s drawing, the viewer stands on the south shore of the Lehigh River looking north to Palmer’s bridge with the mountains of New Jersey in the distance. A historical photograph (figure 4.15) taken from a similar vantage point confirms the location of the bridge, which connected the city of Easton seen on the left with Phillipsburg, New Jersey, seen on the right. This photograph and Köllner’s drawing have enabled me to identify the site of Nimmo Moran’s etching. If we believe the artist’s assertion that she incised her copper plate out of doors, then she would have been standing in Easton on the west side of the Delaware River with Phillipsburg visible across the river to the east. The artist, and by extension the viewer, is looking south at the covered bridge in the foreground and the LVRR Delaware River Bridge in the distance.

In Nimmo Moran’s print, the LVRR Delaware River Bridge appears just south of

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80 Although the exact construction date of the bridge is unknown, it was completed sometime between 1871, when the CNJ acquired a route west to the Pennsylvania coalfields, and 1879, when Nimmo Moran drew the bridge.
81 This work is one in a series of watercolors depicting American scenery that Köllner executed in the early 1840s. Goupil, Vibert, & Co. published fifty-four of these watercolors as hand-colored lithographs in Views of American Cities (1848-1851).
82 Although the date of this photograph is unknown, it must predate 1896, which was the year that Palmer’s covered bridge was replaced by a modern, metal structure.
83 It is critical to note that the final etching is a mirror image of Nimmo Moran’s vantage point, underscored by the reversed lettering of her plate signature in the lower left corner.
Palmer’s covered bridge; yet in reality, the two bridges are more than a third of a mile apart. Moreover, situated between these two bridges is a third bridge – the Delaware River Bridge of the CNJ, which Nimmo Moran had sketched on July 23, 1879 (figure 4.13). In the final etching, she removed this intermediate bridge and condensed the space between Palmer’s covered bridge and the LVRR railway bridge. This juxtaposition clearly highlights the changing face of the industrial waterfront, contrasting the past with the present in a visually engaging way. These pictorial manipulations suggest that she shared her husband’s views on topographical accuracy: in 1879, Moran was quoted in Samuel Benjamin’s *Our American Artists* as stating, “The literal truth counts for nothing; it is within the grasp of any one who has had an ordinary art-education.”84 Throughout her career, Nimmo Moran strove to capture much more than the “literal truth,” instead presenting viewers with personal interpretations of the landscape.

I have located five extant impressions of *Bridge over the Delaware*. Klackner noted that this work was “one of the plates most esteemed by the etcher herself” and he remarked upon the juxtaposition of old and new, writing that the print depicts “A covered bridge of the older type, with a railroad bridge seen beyond it.”85 Four of the five impressions were naturally printed in black ink: in each instance, the surface of the plate was uniformly wiped clean, leaving ink in the incised lines and creating a faint, even tone over the unetched surfaces of the plate. Areas of shadow, notably on the right pier of the covered bridge, were created with dense cross-hatching rather than ink manipulation. In the fifth impression (figure 4.16), printed in brown ink on wove paper, she strategically left a thin layer plate tone in the lower left corner, creating a subtle differentiation between earth, water, and sky. This soft, translucent wash is reminiscent of watercolor, a medium Nimmo Moran practiced in the 1870s.

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85 Klackner, 17.
This impression (figure 4.16) may correspond to an etching described in a lifetime inventory of the artist’s work, which reads: “Bridge over the Delaware River at Easton, Pa 1879. Printed with oil paint (Vandyke Brown) & color dragged on parts of surface with a brush. Printed by the artist. Size 6 x 9 in. #20^{00} [sic].^{86} The asking price of twenty-dollars is higher than any other etching listed in the inventory, revealing the commercial advantages of hand printing. Moreover, her application of Vandyke Brown with a brush underscores the hand-made, painterly quality of the etching, which she printed with oil paint rather than printer’s ink.

A transparent earth pigment traditionally composed of bituminous earth with burnt umber, Vandyke Brown was popular with seventeenth-century artists, notably the Flemish painter Anthony Van Dyck after whom it was named. The pigment’s association with the art of the seventeenth century – the age of Rembrandt and the golden age of etching – made it a particularly appropriate color to be used by an artist of the etching “revival.” The paint lends a richness and warmth to the landscape, enveloping the print in an aura of the antique – an appealing quality to print collectors, who generally favored objects that were aged and worn, tried and true over that which was new, modern, or industrial.

The juxtaposition of old and new, past and present, industry and nature, is a prevalent theme in several of Nimmo Moran’s early etchings. Moreover, her interest in depicting the changing urban landscape, notably the construction and destruction of bridges, was a subject similarly explored by her contemporary James McNeill Whistler. In 1859, Whistler etched his earliest bridge scene *Old Westminster Bridge*, depicting the stone arches of the eighteenth-

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^{86} This inventory was most likely compiled in preparation for the retrospective exhibition of Mary Nimmo Moran’s prints at the Christian Klackner Gallery in 1889. The titles, dates, measurements, selling prices, and order of the prints in Klackner’s published catalogue closely follow this handwritten inventory. An inscription on the last page of reads: “List of Etchings / M Nimmo Moran / up to Jan 1st 1888,” indicating that it was compiled just one year prior to the exhibition. “Catalogue of Etchings by M. Nimmo Moran. Member of the New York Etching Club & The Society of Painter Etchers of London, Eng.” January 1, 1881, A 63, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
century traverse that spanned the River Thames in London. This print was one of four bridge scenes he published in his series *Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames*, widely known as the “Thames Set,” including *Old Hungerford Bridge* (1861), *Battersea Dawn (Cadogan Pier)* (1863), and *Chelsea Bridge and Church* (1871).

When depicting the bridges of the River Thames, Whistler was, as art historian Katharine Lochnan argues, “more interested in the old bridges which spanned the Thames than in the wonders of Victorian technology with which they were being systematically replaced during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s.” Privileging old over new, he visualized the process of waterfront redevelopment and bridge reconstruction. In *Westminster Bridge in Progress* (1861, figure 4.17), he captured the construction of the new wrought-iron structure built to replace the old Westminster Bridge, the arches of which remain visible through the foreground. He made a similar juxtaposition in *Old Hungerford Bridge* (1861, figure 4.18), in which he presents the old suspension bridge alongside the recently erected iron railway bridge to Charing Cross. Lochnan notes that, “His interest in the wooden bridge as a subject for etching may have sprung from the same preservationist instinct that led him to record vanishing parts of dockland. He spent considerable energy capturing the bridges that were quickly closing or being demolished.”

Whistler’s desire to capture and preserve the bridges of London – impressions that Charles Baudelaire described as “subtle and lively” representations of “the profound and intricate

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87 All titles and dates for Whistler’s etchings are drawn from Margaret F. MacDonald et al., *James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, A Catalogue Raisonné* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2012), on-line website at http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk.
89 Ibid., 121.
90 Ibid., 179.
poetry of a vast capital” – may have inspired Nimmo Moran’s interest in the subject.\(^9\) She certainly knew of Whistler, whose notorious lawsuit against British critic John Ruskin was reported on at length in the American press in 1878, and she may have been familiar with his early bridge scenes, especially those published in the “Thames Set,” since his prints were frequently exhibited in the United States in the 1870s.\(^3\)

Examples of Whistler’s etchings were displayed in the “Black and White” rooms at the annual exhibitions of the American Water Color Society in 1875, 1877, and 1878.\(^3\) Moreover, in January 1879, more than sixty of his etching and drypoints were featured in an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and that summer impressions of the “French Set” and “Thames Set” were exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy.\(^4\) Nimmo Moran may have seen his etchings at any of these venues and at the very least was familiar with his work through written descriptions and exhibition reviews.

In August 1879, critic W.C. Brownell published a lengthy article on Whistler’s work in *Scribner’s Monthly*.\(^5\) Titled “Whistler in Painting and Etching,” it was the first substantive essay on the artist published in the United States and, as art historian Linda Merrill notes, “one of the earliest discriminating accounts of Whistler’s art…to be published anywhere.”\(^6\) Richly illustrated with wood engravings after examples of the artist’s paintings and prints, including

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\(^6\) Merrill, 17.
Vauxhall Bridge (1861), Thames Warehouses (1859), and The Little Rotherhithe (1861), the article provides important insights into the character of his etched impressions. Brownell describes his prints as having “the definite element of beauty – beautiful lines, forms, atmospheric effects – as well as picturesqueness” and yet “one notices distinct character, definite and original individuality, and the absence of any thing like the saccharine quality…These qualities explain Mr. Whistler’s undisputed excellence as an etcher.”

When Brownell’s article appeared in Scribner’s in August 1879, Mary Nimmo Moran was in Easton etching works such as Bridge over the Bushkill and Bridge over the Delaware, while Whistler was executing a series of strikingly similar etchings in London. Focused on the old wooden bridges of the Thames, he executed plates such as Chelsea (1878/1879), Old Putney Bridge (1879), Little Putney Bridge (1879), and Old Battersea Bridge (1879). Art historian Margaret MacDonald has argued that with these works “Whistler was directly appealing to a nostalgic pubic, and to people who were interested in the history of the Thames.” For instance, when etching Old Putney Bridge (figure 4.19) “he would have known that the bridge was due to be replaced. He was thus recording yet another site on the Thames before it disappeared.”

In addition to similarities in subject matter, there are interesting compositional resemblances to note when comparing Nimmo Moran and Whistler’s etchings from the summer 1879. Whistler’s Chelsea (1879, figure 4.20), for example, features London’s Old Battersea Bridge – an eighteenth-century timber structure, which like Palmer’s covered bridge in Easton

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97 The paintings and etchings reproduced in Brownell’s article were drawn from the private collection of Samuel Putnam Avery, who began acquiring modern painter-etchings following Cadart’s visit to the United States in 1866. Avery’s collection was an important resource for American artists interested in studying works by their European contemporaries. Although Avery later purchased two of Nimmo Moran’s prints, including The Goose Pond, Easthampton (1881, New York Public Library) and Summer, Easthampton (1883, New York Public Library), I can only speculate on whether or not the artist had the opportunity to view and study his collection during this pivotal moment in her career.

98 Brownell, 491-492.

would soon be replaced by a modern iron traverse. As in Nimmo Moran’s *Bridge over the Delaware* (figure 4.16), Whistler positioned Old Battersea Bridge in the middle distance of the composition with a newer suspension bridge visible through its wooden piers. Both scenes are framed on the right by buildings and trees, and feature boats and barges on the water – visual devices that lead our eye through the composition. The etchings are also similarly cropped on the left side, as each bridge appears to fade as it approaches the edge of the plate. This cropping creates the effect of a vignette and it was a technique that Whistler used in other bridge scenes from this summer, including his *Little Putney Bridge* (1879, figure 4.21).

There are, however, noteworthy differences between their works. Firstly, Whistler incorporated figures into his compositions, notably pedestrians on London’s bridges, while Nimmo Moran rarely included figures in her etchings. Secondly, Whistler was deeply influenced by the aesthetics of Japanese woodblock prints, notably the works of Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige. Drawn to the formal and stylistic possibilities of the bridge, Whistler often adopted an elevated horizon line and low vantage point, emphasizing open expanses of water in the foreground of his impressions. In contrast, Nimmo Moran approached her subjects classically, adopting a frontal perspective and providing viewers with a safe point of entry into the composition – such as the stretch of land in the foreground of *Bridge over the Delaware*.

Nineteenth-century critics and collectors had the opportunity to compare the artists’ works in an exhibition of American etchings on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, from April 11 to May 9, 1881. Curated by Koehler, the exhibition’s “Third Print Room” contained

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100 In 1879, Old Battersea Bridge was described in *The Times* as “one of the old-fashioned timber structures, which will before long have to be removed and a new bridge built in its place.” It was closed to traffic in 1883 and then replaced by Sir Joseph Bazalgette’s new cast-iron Battersea Bridge in 1890. “Freeing the Bridges,” *The Times* (May 24, 1879) quoted in MacDonald et al., “Old Battersea Bridge: Site,” accessed online April 29, 2015, [http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/subject/display/index.php?catno=K177&rs=20&key=s_bridge&xml=sub](http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/subject/display/index.php?catno=K177&rs=20&key=s_bridge&xml=sub).

101 Hokusai, for instance, published a series of woodblocks prints titled *Unusual Views of Celebrated Bridges in the Provinces* in 1827-1830. For more information on the influence of Japanese prints on Whistler’s etched bridge scenes, see Lochnan, 179-180.
seven etchings by Nimmo Moran, including Bridge over the Bushkill and Bridge over the Delaware, as well as a selection of Whistler’s “Scenes on the Thames.”

Although it is unlikely that Nimmo Moran traveled to Boston to see this exhibition, she undoubtedly attended a highly anticipated exhibition of Whistler’s work, which included 130 of his etchings and drypoints, at the Union League Club, New York, in December 1881.

Earlier that year, the Moran family moved from Newark to New York City, establishing a studio in Booth’s Theater Building located on the southeast corner of West 23rd Street and 6th Avenue and a residence on West 51st Street near 7th Avenue. Given their growing interest in the contemporary etching “revival,” as well as the publicity surrounding the exhibition of Whistler’s work, the couple could have easily attended the show at the Union League Club, which was located just one mile from their residence. If Nimmo Moran was not already familiar with Whistler’s bridge scenes of 1879, one can imagine the surprise with which she may have viewed prints such as Chelsea, Old Putney Bridge, and Little Putney Bridge for the first time.

While Whistler continued to pursue the motif of the bridge in his etchings – first in Venice in 1880 and then in Amsterdam in 1889 – Nimmo Moran etched bridges infrequently after 1881. When the motif does appear in her prints – as seen in works such as “’Tween the Gloaming and the Mirk” (1883, figure 5.26) and Gardiner’s Bay, From Fresh Ponds, L.I. (1884, figure 5.36) – it plays a secondary role to the natural landscape, which became the primary focus.

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102 Cat. nos. 299-305 and 467-476 in Exhibition of American Etchings, April 11 to May 9, 1881 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1881), 30 and 36.
103 Catalogue of Etchings and Dry Points to Be Exhibited at the Galleries of the Union League Club, New York, December, 1881 (New York: The Union League Club, 1881).
104 The Moran family was settled into their new home by June 6, 1881, when The Newark Daily Advertiser reported, “Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Moran are comfortably situated in the new home in New York city [sic], and are as industrious as ever, working steadily with a true love for their chosen profession; they are making many friends with their social, pleasant manners and agreeable entertaining.” The Newark Daily Advertiser (June 6, 1881) quoted in Anderson, 232. Thomas Moran had established a studio in Booth’s Theater Building two years prior. Writing on February 4, 1879 to the first curator of the Corcoran Art Gallery William MacLeod, Moran explained, “Art Matters are improving in every way in New York with the revival of business. Many men who have been students abroad are returning & taking studios in New York…I have taken a studio in…Booth’s Theater Building.” Thomas Moran to William MacLeod, February 4, 1879, Letter 1517, Director’s Records, Corcoran quoted in Anderson, 223.
of her etched oeuvre in the 1880s. Yet she maintained a deep commitment to capturing and preserving the past in her etchings, focusing for a time on the built, urban environments of Easton, Newark, and New York City, before resolutely turning her attention to the natural environs of East Hampton, Long Island.

In September 1879, Nimmo Moran left Easton and returned to Newark where she continued to etch, executing two views of the city – one urban, the other rural (figures 4.22 and 4.24). In *Newark, N.J., From the Passaic* (figure 4.22), she explored the pictorial potential of Newark’s industrial waterfront lined with modern factories, warehouses, and a cast-iron railroad bridge. She contrasts the factory’s billowing smokestack with three church steeples and the iron railroad bridge with a simple wooden pier – echoing the juxtaposition of timber and metal featured in *Bridge over the Delaware*. The pier cut across the composition separating the viewer, who stands on the near shore, from the city on the distant shore. New Jersey’s Passaic River runs through the middle ground, creating another barrier between viewer and city, nature and industry – a compositional strategy she adopted in *Newark from the Meadows* (figure 2.48).

Nimmo Moran printed at least two impressions of *Newark, N.J., From the Passaic* on silk (figure 4.23). The practice of printing etchings on silk was increasingly popular with artists beginning in the early 1880s. The textile not only enhanced the commercial value of the impression, but also underscored its status as a luxury, fine art object. At first glance, the sumptuousness of the silk support appears to contrast with the grittiness of the urban scene. Yet for a wealthy industrialist, several of whom began collecting American painter-etchings in the 1880s, such a scene may have evoked the source of his success and wealth. A silk impression of *Newark, N.J., From the Passaic* (figure 4.23) was acquired by Baltimore industrialist and banker T. Harrison Garrett – son of John W. Garrett, president of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad
The B&O Railroad ran through Newark, New Jersey, and may be the track featured in Nimmo Moran’s etching.

In addition to the industrial waterfront, Nimmo Moran etched the natural environs of Newark, composing a strikingly different view of the city. Hay-ricks, Newark Meadows (figure 4.24) is the pictorial antithesis of Newark, N.J., From the Passaic, for she presents a vision of the natural landscape untouched by industrial activity. The composition is organized around a central body of water that narrows as it recedes to the horizon. The artist paid particular attention to capturing nature’s diversity, rendering each reed and blade of grass with great variety and individuality. She varied her etched line to recreate different textures – from the short, choppy marks of the haystacks to the irregular, autographic “squiggles” of the topsoil – and she allowed unetched areas of the plate to connote open water and clear sky.

Compositionally, the print resembles the painted and etched works of Charles-François Daubigny, notably his views of the river Seine, such as Vue prise sur les bords de la Seine (View from the Banks of the Seine) (1851, figure 4.25), which features a central body of water framed on the left and right by trees and lush vegetation. Nimmo Moran was familiar with Daubigny’s work, examples of which she studied in France in 1866. Moreover, the growing popularity of Barbizon art with American collectors in the 1870s and 1880s may have encouraged the artist’s

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105 In the summer 1881, the publicity department of the B&O Railroad Company commissioned Thomas Moran to complete a series of illustrations for their upcoming publication Picturesque B&O. Historical and Descriptive. Moran spent the summer with the publication’s author J.G. Pangborn, engraver John Karst, and a B&O railroad employee traveling by train through Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania to the railroad’s southern terminus in New Mexico. Nimmo Moran accompanied her husband on part of this journey joining the “quartet,” as they were called, in Staunton, Virginia. A portrait of the artist, drawn by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris and engraved by Karst, appears in Picturesque B&O. She is also described at length by Pangborn, who wrote: “The feminine Yellowstone [Mary Nimmo Moran], trim of figure, graceful in action and in repose; apt, clear-headed, and quick as a flash in repartee, her voice was a charm none could withstand: used so deftly in conversation and so musically in song, there was no end to the demands upon it. Herself an artist of rare excellence, her pictures had been admired at many exhibitions and her name honored in circles where only talent can enter.” It was likely through Moran’s commission that Garrett learned of Nimmo Moran’s work. Over time, he acquired eleven of her etchings (two of which were printed on silk) and later gifted these works to the Baltimore Museum of Art. J.G. Pangborn, Picturesque B&O. Historical and Descriptive (Chicago: Knight and Leonard, 1882), 90-92. For a reproduction of Ferris’s portrait of Nimmo Moran, see Pangborn, 75.
pursuit of a Romantic landscape aesthetic, which embraced the direct study of nature and subjective interpretations of the uncultivated landscape and rural countryside.

Although modern industry is not visible in *Hay-ricks, Newark Meadows*, Nimmo Moran nevertheless alludes to the human presence in the landscape: small farmhouses are visible on the horizon and the hayricks, or haystacks, in the right foreground are emblematic of rural agriculture. A vision of pastoral America, this etching depicts and preserves the country’s agrarian roots – the foundation upon which the nation built its success, but one that was rapidly changing and transforming as a result of fast-paced industrialization. This etching was likely conceived as a pendant to *Newark, N.J., From the Passaic*, as the two plates measure the same size and present contrasting views of the American landscape, documenting the nation’s shift from a thriving agrarian economy to an industrial superpower.

In addition to her two views of Newark, Nimmo Moran also etched her first Long Island landscape *Easthampton Barrens* (figure 4.26) during her husband’s absence in the summer 1879. The plate represents a solitary figure walking across an open, sandy expanse in East Hampton – the landscape that inspired much of her etched oeuvre in the 1880s. The Morans first visited East Hampton in the summer 1878, returning again the following July, prior to Moran’s trip out west and Nimmo Moran’s trip to Easton.\(^\text{106}\) While Moran sketched and dated one view of Montauk’s shoreline in July 1879, I have not been able to locate any drawings that Nimmo Moran executed in Long Island that summer.\(^\text{107}\) However, she etched *Easthampton Barrens* upon her return home to Newark and was most likely working from pencil studies.

\(^\text{106}\) The Moran family rented “Conklin House” in East Hampton in the early summer months of 1879, although the precise dates of their stay is not known. According to Thomas Moran’s biographer Thurman Wilkins, a woman by the name of “Aunt Phoebe Parsons Stratton Conklin Huntting,” the aunt of Senator Roscoe Conkling, owned Conklin House and rented it to the Moran family on at least two occasions. Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains*, 2\(^\text{nd}\) Rev. Ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 191.

\(^\text{107}\) This work is reproduced in Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches*, 174-175.
As in *Hay-ricks, Newark Meadows* (figure 4.24), *Easthampton Barrens* (figure 4.26) depicts the rural American landscape featuring haystacks, a farmhouse, a windmill, and a weathervane. Despite her inclusion of these man-made motifs, Nimmo Moran’s focus is overwhelmingly on the natural forms in the landscape, closely detailing the vegetation growing in the sand dunes, as well as the different trees that frame the composition on the left and right. The variety of her etched line is more pronounced in this print than in earlier works from this summer and, as Klackner noted, “the rapid growth of the etcher’s technique is distinctly marked in this plate.”¹⁰⁸ One can discern the confidence with which she began to wield the etching needle: her etched lines appear to writhe, twist, and turn, conveying a sense of movement, as if the wind has kicked up, gently swaying the leaves of the trees and the sand dune grasses. She successfully created a sense of color and light, using hatching and cross-hatching to indicate dark sky, while unetched areas of the plate denote white clouds and bright light.

When printing this plate, Nimmo Moran made few ink manipulations from one impression to the next. She typically wiped the plate clean, leaving a slight amount plate tone in the fore- and middle ground of the composition to create a subtle differentiation between sand and sky.¹⁰⁹ Rather than boldly painting ink on the surface of the plate or experimenting with techniques such as *retroussage*, she instead allowed the etched line to stand on its own with little or no alteration. Impressions of this plate reveal that in addition to artificial printing, she was also interested in exploring the aesthetic potential of natural printing. “In such cases,” Hamerton wrote in 1876, “the brilliance of the white paper between the lines is counted upon as a part of the effect, and must not be obscured by the printer.”¹¹⁰ This is evident in *Easthampton Barrens*,

¹⁰⁸ Klackner, 17.
¹⁰⁹ I have documented twenty-one impressions pulled from this plate, all of which were “naturally” printed in a similar manner.
¹¹⁰ Hamerton, *Etching and Etchers* (1876), 442.
where the white of the paper is strategically employed as a compositional component. Over the course of her etching career, she selectively alternated between artificial and natural printing, allowing her imagery to dictate the appropriate technique.

Naturally printing *Easthampton Barrens* did not deter the artist from experimenting with different inks and supports. She adopted various shades of black and brown ink and printed on a wide range of papers, including wove, laid, parchment, handmade Sweden, and silk. By varying her printing combinations – for instance, printing in black ink on wove paper (figure 4.27), black ink on parchment paper (figure 4.28), and black ink on laid paper (figure 4.29) – she underscored the handmade, one-of-a-kind quality of each impression. This also enabled her to create price differentiations between impressions – charging buyers more for handmade paper or silk – while exploring the aesthetic possibilities of different inks and supports, creating variations on an image. For example, when printing *Easthampton Barrens* in black ink on laid paper (figure 4.29), the image captures the cold bleakness of a bright winter morning; yet when printing the plate in brown ink on silk (figure 4.30), she transformed the scene into a warm autumn evening.

Over the course of Nimmo Moran’s etching career, she continued to explore many of the same subjects, themes, and techniques present in the six plates that she etched in the summer 1879. Although her technical skill and etching aesthetic evolved over time and with experience, she maintained her dedication to depicting the American landscape and continued to experiment with etching techniques and tools, pushing the painterly possibilities of the medium.

**“Unanimously Elected”**

Moran returned to Newark from his western excursion in late September 1879. When Nimmo Moran shared with him the plates she completed over the course of the summer, he was reportedly taken aback by her progress. Ruth Moran wrote that he “found her style so original
that he hardly knew what to say” and Benson notes that he “pronounced these plates to be funny-looking things…there was a good deal of Moran amusement over what the perpetrator was frankly informed were ‘jolly queer etchings.’”

Everett put a slightly more positive spin on the story, writing that while “the result of his wife’s initial efforts with the needle were a surprise…they were so original, so pronounced in their characteristics, so unlike anything he himself had done or had seen, that he scarcely knew whether to praise or condemn.” Moran’s feedback must have been primarily encouraging since Nimmo Moran submitted four of these six etchings for display in the “Black and White Room” at the upcoming Thirteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society held at the National Academy of Design in February 1880.

This “Black and White Room” was comprised of 130 works, including a selection of original etchings by members of the New York Etching Club (NYEC), notably Samuel Colman, Henry Farrer, R. Swain Gifford, and James D. Smillie. Founded in 1877 by Farrer, Smillie, and the physician-turned-amateur-etcher Leroy M. Yale, the NYEC was dedicated to the production, promotion, and exhibition of original etchings in the United States. Twenty-one members (all of whom were male) attended the club’s first meeting in Smillie’s New York studio on May 2, 1877. Many of the men were well-established artists in other media, including painting, photography, lithography, wood engraving, architecture, and design; yet etching was an

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111 Ruth Moran, “Mary Nimmo Moran,” typed manuscript, undated, page 5, A 59, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection, and Benson, 79.
112 Everett, 9-10.
113 Prints by members of the NYEC are marked with an asterisk in the exhibition catalogue. *Illustrated Catalogue. Thirteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society* (New York: The Society, 1880).
115 Fredericks, 3.
unfamiliar process to most members, who joined the club to obtain practical training in this “new” medium.\textsuperscript{116}

A demonstration plate was executed at the club’s first meeting: measuring 2-1/4 inches high by 3-1/2 inches wide, the plate was grounded by Smillie, drawn by Gifford, and printed by Leroy.\textsuperscript{117} Smillie later described the excitement with which the first impression was pulled from the press: “the damped sheet of thin, silky Japan paper was spread upon the gently warmed plate; the heavy steel roller of the printing press, with its triple facing of thick, soft blanket, was slowly rolled over it, and in another moment, finding scant room, the first-born of the New York Etching Club was being tenderly passed from hand to hand.”\textsuperscript{118}

In 1878, 1879, and 1881, the New York Etching Club exhibited etchings in the “Black and White Room” of the American Water Color Society’s annual exhibitions held at the National Academy.\textsuperscript{119} While these exhibitions were open to members and non-members, meeting minutes indicate that the Club oversaw the selection, installation, cataloguing, and sale of all etchings on display.\textsuperscript{120} Nimmo Moran was not yet an elected member of the NYEC, yet she submitted her etchings for the club’s consideration. She apparently did so “with some hesitancy,” yet with this move, Ruth Moran noted, “the Gordian Knot was cut.”\textsuperscript{121} It was a bold gesture, but one that paid off immediately, as the club included four of her prints – \textit{Bridge over the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.} (figure 4.4), \textit{Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.} (figure 4.11), \textit{Newark, N.J., From the

\textsuperscript{116} Fredericks, xvi.
\textsuperscript{117} Printed from the original plate, an impression of this etching served as the frontispiece to J.R.W. Hitchcock, \textit{Etching in America} (New York: White, Stokes, & Allen, 1896). For a reproduction of the etching, see Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{118} James D. Smillie, \textit{Catalogue of the New York Etching Club Exhibition...held at the National Academy of Design...} (New York: The Etching Club, 1882) quoted in Ibid., xv.
\textsuperscript{119} Between 1882 and 1893 (with the exception of 1890) the NYEC organized independent etching exhibitions at the National Academy of Design that were open to club members, as well as non-members from the United States and Europe. These exhibitions were accompanied by deluxe catalogues, which included small-plate versions of many of the original etchings on view in the exhibition. Mandel, 31.
\textsuperscript{120} New York Etching Club Minutes, January 12, 1880, reprinted in Fredericks, 23-24.
\textsuperscript{121} “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” \textit{The East Hampton Star} (September 29, 1899) and Ruth Moran, “Mary Nimmo Moran,” typed manuscript, undated, page 5, A 59, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
Passaic (figure 4.22), and Easthampton, Barrens (figure 4.26) – in the exhibition.\textsuperscript{122} Her etchings were “hung without demur and were awarded such a high place, and so much enthusiasm was called forth by these remarkable studies, that the unknown artist was elected a member of the society.”\textsuperscript{123} Her election to the NYEC would not take place until February 1881, but this successful exhibition of her etchings certainly encouraged her pursuit of the medium.

Over the next nine months, Nimmo Moran etched seven new plates, all of which were included in the \textit{Third Annual Exhibition of Black and White Art, Under the Auspices of the Salmagundi Sketch Club}.\textsuperscript{124} Established in 1871 by sculptor Jonathan Scott Hartley, the Salmagundi Sketch Club organized its first exhibition of “Black and White Art” in 1878. Two years later, the Sketch Club invited the Etching Club to participate in its annual exhibition, scheduled to run from December 18, 1880 to January 1, 1881. Print historian Stephen Fredericks argues that the Etching’s Club’s decision to accept the Sketch’s Club’s invitation was strategic, for “not only were the early Salmagundi Sketch Club exhibitions quite popular with both artists and the viewing public, but the New York Etching Club members wanted to be aligned with other active graphic artists, and have their new etchings seen alongside other widely practiced forms of graphic art.”\textsuperscript{125} In the end, the show included 74 wood engravings, 34 drawings, and 134 etchings, including seven by Nimmo Moran.

The exhibition was favorably reviewed in the press and did much to encourage American appreciation for the black and white arts, especially original etchings. Reviewing the show in \textit{The American Art Review}, critic S.G.W. Benjamin argued that, “there is no art that so directly

\textsuperscript{122} Cat. nos. 404, 408, 457-458 in \textit{Thirteenth Annual Exhibition of the American Water Color Society}, 24 and 26.

\textsuperscript{123} “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” \textit{The East Hampton Star} (September 29, 1899).


\textsuperscript{125} Fredericks, xix.
appeals to a cultured imagination as ‘black and white.’ In that simple medium the child scrawls its first artistic yearnings; but with the same means, also, the highest feeling improvises its inspirations. An imaginative people find pleasure in simple form without color, or in the mystery of chiaroscuro, which suggests such an inexhaustible imagery.” When describing the etchings in the exhibition, Benjamin asserted that one must “fully appreciate the work done by our artists, – work that equals much of the most valued done abroad, and that can be successfully produced by the most sensitively artistic natures.”

The seven etchings that Nimmo Moran displayed in this exhibition depict the landscape of East Hampton, Long Island (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five). The success of these prints combined with the four etchings she exhibited the year prior earned her election to the New York Etching Club. The meeting minutes from January 10, 1881 indicate that, “the name of Mrs Nimmo Moran was proposed for membership by Mr. F. S. Church seconded by Messers Miller and Deilman.” One month later on February 11, 1881, members gathered in Henry Farrer’s studio at 51 West 10th Street where “Mrs Nimmo Moran, proposed at the last meeting, was unanimously elected [a member].” She was the Etching Club’s first female member, marking a major milestone in the artist’s career and the history of American printmaking.

It has been asserted that the NYEC exhibited the artist’s prints under the assumption that she was a man. Ruth Moran wrote that “the signature ‘M. Nimmo’ was unknown and the identity was not revealed. The New York Etching Club never imagined that the vigorous and bold lines were done by a woman’s hand.” This story was repeated as recently as 1984, when art

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127 New York Etching Club Minutes, January 10, 1881, reprinted in Fredericks, 22.
128 New York Etching Club Minutes, February 11, 1881, reprinted in Ibid., 34.
historian Marilyn Francis noted that “when Thomas persuaded Mary to submit the first four impressions pulled from the plates to the New York Etching Club, they were accepted unanimously, and as her signature was not known, they were assumed to be by a man.” Yet correspondence between Nimmo Moran and secretary Henry Farrer reveals that Club members were aware of the artist’s gender. Farrer addressed her acceptance letter “Dear Madam,” writing, “I have the pleasure to inform you that at the regular meeting of the N.Y. Etching Club, held Feb. 11th 1881, you were unanimously elected a member.” Moreover, one-month prior, Thomas Moran’s membership was confirmed and the NYEC was aware of the relationship between the two artists. In fact, it may have been her relationship with Moran that encouraged the club to fairly consider the artist for membership.

In 1893, Francis Benson formulated a similar story when recounting Nimmo Moran’s election to London’s Society of Painter-Etchers (SPE). Benson explained that the artist sent a selection of prints to “the exhibition of Painter-Etchers of London, where they were all well hung, and the committee, supposing M. Nimmo Moran to be a man, voted him – or rather her – into membership with that august body – the first woman admitted to the charmed circle.” Nimmo Moran was the only woman of the Society’s sixty-five original fellows, yet SPE council members were well aware that she was a woman. In her acceptance letter, dated May 2, 1881, the word “Sir” is crossed out twice and replaced by “Madam” (figure 4.31). By perpetuating the myth that Nimmo Moran’s success was the result of gender misidentification, critics and scholars have done a disservice to the artist and her work.

131 This letter and its original envelope, which is addressed to “M. Nimmo Moran / Booths Building / 23rd St. & 6th Ave / City,” is in the Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
132 Benson, 79.
Given the difficulty with which women artists struggled to gain professional recognition as a result of their gender, it is important to emphasize that Nimmo Moran’s work was commended and admired even though it was well-known that she was a woman. Members of the NYEC and the SPE could have easily dismissed her etchings based solely on her gender, as many contemporary art clubs, including the Philadelphia Society of Etchers and the Tile Club barred female membership.\textsuperscript{133} Art historian Kirsten Swinth has demonstrated that these clubs were established in response to the growing number of successful women artists:

Much of the opposition to women seems to have been reluctance to allow women to pass judgment on the work of male artists, in both the informal settings of club meetings and the formal arenas of exhibition juries. Did women have the dispassion and authority to judge art properly? Would men be diminished by women’s evaluation of them?\textsuperscript{134}

Considering the exclusionary climate of the art world and the hostility that many male professionals felt toward their female contemporaries – who they may have described as competitors or adversaries – Nimmo Moran’s successful election to the NYEC and the SPE was truly ground breaking. It speaks not only to the open-mindedness of the men who elected her a member, but also underscores her exceptional abilities as a painter-etcher.

The notion that Nimmo Moran concealed her gender with her “unknown” signature is not entirely far fetched. Throughout her career, she signed works with the following initials and name combinations: “M.M.,” “M.N.M.,” “M.N. Moran,” “M. Nimmo,” and “M. Nimmo Moran.” To my knowledge, she never included her first name “Mary” on an exhibited etching, oil painting, or watercolor.\textsuperscript{135} It is common for artists to sign works simply with their initials or


\textsuperscript{134}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135}Examples of her early sketches, such as \textit{Duffer No. 1} and \textit{Duffer No. 2} (ca. 1873, Gilcrease Museum, 1826.6.29) were signed “Mary,” as were etched impressions that she gifted to family members, such as \textit{Easthampton Barrens} (figure 4.26) and \textit{Evening, Easthampton} (1881, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute, 14773.2), both of which are inscribed “From Aunt Mary to Anette.” However, these works were intended for private consumption, rather than public exhibition.
last name; Thomas Moran, for instance, signed his works “T. Moran” or with his monogram of an overlapping “T” and “M.” Yet for a woman artist hoping to achieve professional recognition in the male-dominated art world of the late nineteenth century, leaving one’s first name out the equation – and thus concealing one’s gender – was certainly not detrimental.

Many female professionals, especially female writers, have worked under male pen names or pseudonyms – from George Elliot and George Sand to J.K. Rowling – in order to ensure that their works are taken seriously. It may have been a strategic decision on Nimmo Moran’s behalf to sign her works simply “M.N.M.” or “M. Nimmo Moran,” thus removing gender from the conversation and forcing critics to evaluate her etchings based solely on artistic merit. This worked successfully on at least one occasion: on April 4, 1881, the London Daily News reviewed the SPE’s first exhibition of nearly 500 contemporary etchings held at the Hanover Gallery in London. Four of Nimmo Moran’s prints were included in the show and she was one of fourteen artists – and one of just two Americans – singled out for praise by the London Daily News: “Mr. M.N. Moran, of New York, also figures as an able etcher even by the side of the work of Mr. Seymour Haden, Mr. Tissot, Mr. C.S. de Gravesande [sic], and Mr. A. Legros.”

The comparison made between the etchings of “Mr. M.N. Moran” and those of Haden, Tissot, S’Gravesande, and Legros speaks to the strength and international appeal of her landscape prints. Yet one can only wonder if the critic would have singled out the artist for praise had he known she was a woman?

Three weeks later, the New York Herald reprinted a selection of quotes from the review in London Daily News, advising readers that, “two of the American exhibitors – Henry Farrer and M. Nimmo Moran (Mrs. Thomas Moran) – are highly complimented. Mrs. Moran’s work is

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so masculine that the *Daily News* critic takes it for that of a man.”

When reprinting the quote from the *London Daily News*, the *New York Herald* removed the prefix “Mr.” mistakenly placed before the artist’s name. Nevertheless, the so-called “masculinity” of her etchings – a coded term used underscore her status as a professional, as well as her bold, experimental approach to the medium – earned her recognition both at home and abroad. Less than two years after executing her first experimental etching on the back of her calling card plate, she emerged as one of America’s most notable painter-etchers.

After more than a decade of drawing, illustrating, and painting in both watercolor and oil, Nimmo Moran found in etching a medium that she could successfully pursue: it offered her the opportunity to explore her aesthetic interests – namely *plein-air* landscape work – and opened new doors for professional recognition and commercial gain. In 1884, a critic reviewing the annual exhibition of the NYEC remarked upon her successful transition from painting to etching:

> Already we can point to three or four who make etching a specialty, as it should always be. Messrs. Parrish and Platt and Mrs. Moran do much better in etching than they do in any other way. And, although they are none too severe, they would be the last to describe their work as mere amusement. Nor do they feel painfully the limitations of their art, knowing that, in one way, there is an endless road for them to traverse…But as the way is a long and a hard one, however strictly you keep to it, the reward of success, from an artistic point of view, is proportionately great. There is no other method than etching by which an artist can so readily and so completely express his ideas or his feelings.

Her pursuit of etching led her down a new artistic path in the 1880s and the rewards were in fact “proportionately great.”

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137 “Fine Arts,” *New York Herald* (April 26, 1881), newspaper clipping, B-181, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection. On this clipping Thomas Moran wrote, “Sent by J.B.G.” J.B.G. most likely refers to Joseph Benson Gilder, the younger brother of Moran’s close friend Richard Watson Gilder and co-editor of *The Critic* with his sister Jeannette Leonard Gilder. This newspaper clipping is one of the few that the Moran family saved and gifted to the East Hampton Library, revealing the importance of the review in Nimmo Moran’s career.

No lovelier stretch of country, none more pleasing to the eye of the artist or poet, none more peaceful and poetically happy in its outward expression, or more varied and interesting in its contour and color, is to be found anywhere along our Eastern Coast, than lies between the Shinnecock Hills and Montauk. – William McKay Laffan, *The New Long Island: A Handbook of Summer Travel* (1880)

**East Hampton: From Colonial Settlement to Summer Resort**

Beginning in 1878 and continuing until her untimely death in 1899, Mary Nimmo Moran spent prolonged periods of time drawing, etching, and painting along the southern shore of eastern Long Island. She worked primarily in the town of East Hampton, which encompasses the villages of East Hampton and Sag Harbor, as well as the hamlets of Wainscott, Springs, Amagansett, and Montauk (figure 5.1). Although her first excursion to Long Island’s East End lasted only a few weeks, by 1880 Nimmo Moran was spending up to six months of the year in East Hampton, where she and Thomas Moran subsequently built a home-studio that served as their primary summer residence between 1885 and 1899.

In September 1878, the couple made their first excursion to East Hampton at the suggestion of close friend William MacKay Laffan. A journalist, art collector, and painter, Laffan was also a passenger agent for the Long Island Railroad and a member of the bohemian collective known as the Tile Club. Inspired by William Morris and Great Britain’s aesthetic movement, the Tile Club was composed of thirty-one painters, sculptors, and architects,

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2 The modern spelling of East Hampton as two words rather than one began with the establishment of the town’s newspaper *The East Hampton Star* in 1885.
3 Long Island’s East End encompasses the five eastern townships of New York’s Suffolk County, including Riverhead, Southampton, Southold, Shelter Island, and East Hampton.
including Edwin Austin Abbey, William Merritt Chase, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Winslow Homer, and Stanford White, who gathered to socialize, paint ceramic tiles, and promote the decorative arts within the United States.⁶ In 1878, Laffan arranged for club members to participate in an extended sketching trip along Long Island’s southern shore. Traveling by train, the group embarked from Hunter’s Point in Long Island City, making stops at Cap Tree Island, Sayville, Bridgehampton, East Hampton, Montauk, and Shelter Island.⁷

A year after their excursion, Laffan and club member Earl Shinn, who wrote under the pseudonym Edward Strahan, published a detailed account of the trip in *Scribner’s Monthly*. Titled “The Tile Club at Play,” the article recounts their adventures and is illustrated with sketches executed during the journey (figure 5.2). Of all the sites visited, Laffan and Strahan described East Hampton as the most attractive, for it was believed to be one of the few “unspoiled” towns remaining in the United States. A colonial settlement established in 1648, East Hampton maintained much of its agrarian character throughout eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸ The area’s fertile land and close proximity to several bodies of water, including the Atlantic Ocean, Block Island Sound, Gardiner’s Bay, Napeague Bay, and Fort Pond Bay, made it an ideal location for international trade and agricultural development, predominantly raising livestock.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, notably between 1820 and 1850, whaling played a critical role in the town’s economic development. The profitability of whale oil drew an influx of residents, increasing the town’s population by nearly fifty percent between 1800 and

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There was, however, reluctance to expand East Hampton’s Main Street, which has served as the town’s central nucleus since its establishment in 1648. Laid out by colonial settlers, Main Street was originally composed of thirty-four home lots on a mile-long common; more than two hundred years later, the settlement maintained its original organization and was expanded only slightly to include approximately eighty dwellings by 1858.

When the Tile Club arrived in 1878, its members were struck by East Hampton’s seemingly “untouched” character, noting that “our tourists came out upon a scene of freshness and uncontaminated splendor, such as they had no idea existed a hundred miles from New York.” Laffan and Strahan poetically described East Hampton as “a vignette perpetuated in electrotype,” writing:

The town consisted of a single street, and the street was a lawn. An immense *tapis vert* of rich grass, green with June, and set with tapering poplar tress, was bordered on either side of its broad expanse by ancestral cottages, shingled to the ground with mossy squares of old gray “shakes” – the primitive split shingles of antiquity. The sides of these ancient buildings, sweeping to the earth from their gabled eaves in the curves of old age, and tapestried with their faded lichens, were more tent-like than house-like.

Six years earlier, when East Hampton was featured in William Cullen Bryant’s *Picturesque America*, author Oliver Bell Bunce similarly described the town as antique and primitive: “East Hampton consists simply of one single street, three hundred feet in width…The residences are primarily farmers’ houses, congregated in a village after the French method, with their farms stretching to the ocean shore…Few towns in America retain so nearly the primitive habits, tastes, and ideas of our forefathers as East Hampton.”

Despite the idyllic, pre-industrial picture painted by Bunce in 1872 and Laffan and Strahan in 1879, East Hampton was already experiencing considerable economic, social, and

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9 Hefner, “The History of East Hampton.”
10 Laffan and Strahan, 471 and 464.
architectural changes that would transform the town from a rural, agrarian community into a modern summer resort. As early as 1849, author James Fenimore Cooper lamented the modernization of Long Island’s East End in his novel *The Sea Lions; or, The Lost Sealers*. According to Cooper, it was “ever a painful sight to see the rustic virtues rudely thrown aside by the intrusion of what are termed improvements.” He lay much of the blame on the railroad, which he described as “a capital invention for the traveller,” yet he questioned whether it offered “any other benefit than that of pecuniary convenience to the places through which it passes.” Cooper continued:

> How many delightful hamlets, pleasant villages, and even tranquil country towns, are loosing their primitive characters for simplicity and contentment, by the passage of these fiery trains, that drag after them a sort of bastard elegance, a pretension that is destructive of peace of mind, and an uneasy desire in all who dwell by the wayside, to pry into the mysteries of the whole length and breadth of the region it traverses!\(^\text{12}\)

In 1870, the Long Island Railroad was extended east to Bridgehampton, approximately seven miles west of East Hampton. Ruth Moran recalled her family’s first trip in 1878, writing that they descended “out of the terrible Long Island train, into the blackness of Bridgehampton station, and then [into] the stage, smelling deliciously of old leather and hay, we came. Seven miles for the horses to pull us through sandy roads and sweet-smelling trees and bushes.”\(^\text{13}\)

Previously, travel from New York City to East Hampton required a three-day stagecoach ride, yet the railroad’s expansion to Bridgehampton shortened the trip to a mere five hours, leading to increased commercial traffic and a bourgeoning tourist industry.\(^\text{14}\)

Historian Robert Hefner has traced East Hampton’s development over the course of the

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\(^\text{12}\) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Sea Lions; or, The Lost Sealers* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1849), 11-12.

\(^\text{13}\) Ruth Moran, “Memories of East Hampton Artists in 1879,” 1.

\(^\text{14}\) Harrison and Denne, 30-31. In 1895, the Long Island Railroad was extended further east, reaching both East Hampton and Montauk. Historian Jeannette Rattray notes that, “The threat of the railroad’s coming, which had hung over East Hampton since 1856…did not materialize until 1895…Some villagers feared their cows might be disturbed. Some people feared that East Hampton’s rural simplicity might be spoiled, and wrote letters to the paper [The East Hampton Star]. But they were practically delighted when the railroad got here.” Jeannette Edwards Rattray, *Fifty Years of the Maidstone Club, 1891-1941* (East Hampton: The Maidstone Club, 1941), 59-61.
nineteenth century, documenting the effects of the railroad’s arrival upon the town’s economic and social structure:

At the time of East Hampton’s beginnings as a summer resort, the agricultural economy was waning… In the Village of East Hampton the fertile land was sold in the 1870s for the development of summer cottages…. Perhaps the most dramatic change was the 1879 sale of all of Montauk to the Brooklyn financier Arthur W. Benson. This marked the end of the common pasture system at Montauk, which had been in effect for over 220 years and may have been the single greatest resource to East Hampton’s agrarian economy.¹⁵

In addition to the city-dwellers who purchased farmland to build cottages overlooking the ocean, East Hampton attracted middle-class tradesmen, shopkeepers, and laborers, who established commercial businesses in the village to service the needs of the growing summer colony.

While Cooper captured the anxiety many felt toward Long Island’s loss of innocence, there were others who praised the extension of the railroad and the increasing accessibility of summertime recreation. In 1880, The New York Times described the 120-mile stretch of beaches from Brooklyn to Montauk as “A god-send to tired New-Yorkers.” Highlighting Long Island’s resort towns, including Long Beach, Rockaway Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Brighton Beach, The New York Times outlined the manifold benefits of escaping the city in the summer months:

The overheated citizen can find here whatever he desires. Metropolitan luxury and expense, cheap and quiet farm life, or the more adventurous life of the camp or the cabin. The Long Island Railroad has spread its arms all over the island, taking in scores of shady villages and settlements, and affording quick and comfortable transit to thousands of pleasant Summer homes. Hardly a nook or corner on the whole island but offers inducements to the Summer visitor.”¹⁶

As Long Island developed into a destination for “tired New-Yorkers,” it attracted not only the average, urban tourist seeking relief from the heat, but also artists and writers, who similarly took advantage of the natural beauty and restorative power of the landscape.

Following the publication of the Tile Club’s article in Scribner’s, East Hampton attracted

¹⁵ Hefner, “The History of East Hampton.”
an increasing number of landscape painters and printmakers, who sought easily accessible, picturesque locales. Laffan and Strahan had pronounced the town “a painter’s gold-mine, all ‘bits’ and nuggets” and Tile Club member Arthur Quarterly compared the East End to “a Ranelagh beauty in the presence of Reynolds…all the time posing for effect.”17 Although the Tile Club is often credited with “discovering” East Hampton as an artistic destination – setting into motion the development of its thriving artists’ colony in the 1880s and 1890s – Long Island’s East End inspired artists and writers dating back to the eighteenth century.

The earliest Euro-American artists working in the area primarily painted portraits of notable residents and dignitaries, including members of the Native American community who had been living in Paumanok, now Long Island, for at least twelve thousand years prior to the arrival of European settlers.18 In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, local artists catered to the tastes of shipping magnates and businessmen, who made their fortunes in the whaling industry and developed a penchant for luxury goods. Although portraiture was the most popular genre with early patrons, Sag Harbor artist Orlando Hand Bears painted what is believed to be the first landscape of the region in 1835.19 With this work, Bears began a long tradition of landscape painting on Long Island’s East End and by the 1870s it was the predominant genre practiced by artists in the area.

Edward Lamson Henry, John Ferguson Weir, and Winslow Homer were among the earliest artists to arrive in East Hampton in the 1870s. Interested primarily in the bustling activity and oceanfront recreation of East Hampton’s beaches, Henry, Weir, and Homer painted

17 Laffan and Strahan, 471-472.
18 Although records and objects relating to Native American culture on Long Island are limited, portraits such as Nathaniel Smibert’s The Reverend Samson Occom (ca., 1751-1756, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine) reflects the style and interests of European-trained artists working on Long Island in the eighteenth century. On early visual culture on Long Island, see Harrison and Denne, 15-22.
19 Ibid., 30.
seascapes featuring the multitude of overheated urbanites who populated the town in the summer months (figures 5.3-5.5). In Homer’s *East Hampton Beach, Long Island* (figure 5.5), the artist captured a moment of middle-class leisure, as four fashionably dressed women enjoy a sunny day at the shore. Visible in the distance, although veiled in a slight haze, are the bathhouses, carriages, tents, and brush arbors that cluttered the coastline. These structures are also featured in the paintings of Henry and Weir, as they visualized the town’s transformation from a “once quiet resort of the few…to a favorite spot of the many.”

When the Morans first visited East Hampton in September 1878, they were looking to establish a summer residence and studio. They initially explored Feltville, New Jersey, spending two weeks in July 1878 drawing the landscape and the remnants of the town’s deserted sawmill. Although Feltville’s remote and rustic character appealed to the couple, Laffan – who had recently returned from his excursion with the Tile Club – urged the Morans to visit East Hampton. When they arrived approximately four weeks later, they were immediately enamored by the natural diversity of the landscape, which offered a visual feast of ocean views and sand dunes, forest interiors and ancient homesteads.

**East Hampton: The American Barbizon**

In April 1883, critic Charles Burr Todd authored an article on East Hampton for *Lippincott’s Magazine* in which he christened the town “The American Barbison [sic]”:

Barbison, the well known resort of so many French artists and art-students, where Millet and a whole colony of painters have found inspiration and subjects worthy of their pencils, lies in the heart of the ancient forest of Fontainebleau, at any easy distance from the great capital. East Hampton, which we have ventured to call the American Barbison, is a village of Puritan origin, situated at the south-eastern extremity of Long Island, in a little oasis of meadows and wheat-fields, that owes some portion of its attractiveness to

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its surroundings of sand and scrub.  

By comparing East Hampton to the famed French village, Todd underscored its growing popularity as an artists’ retreat: “The summer phase of the village is almost entirely artistic. What painter first discovered it is a subject for speculation; but when discovered its possibilities in the way of art rapidly became known, and it has been for several years the summer home of many favorites of the public.”

Todd described the “tolerably uniform” daily routine of the artists in town, noting that “out-door work was usually done in the soft light and shade of early morning or evening. In-door work occupied a part of the intervening hours if the artist was industrious. At eleven there was a gathering on the bathing-beach, and an hour’s wild sporting with the surges of the Atlantic. There was tennis for those who cared for it, straw-parties and sailing-parties, moonlight rides to the beach.” Yet it was the industriousness of the artist that separated him or her from the average urban tourist. In addition to bathing and tennis, sailing parties and moonlit rides, the artist escaped the city in the summer months in order to throw him/herself into his/her work.

The separation of the artist from the urban metropolis was believed to be a critical step in boosting creativity. In 1866, French critic Frédéric Henriet encouraged artists to leave the city in search of new subjects and inspiration: “It’s time to pack the black suit of social concessions into the armoire; it’s time to forget for six months the auction house and official salons, and the art dealer and the collector…The hour of departure has arrived!” An artist such as Charles-François Daubigny embodied the image of the outsider, for he lived, as Henriet noted, “on the

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23 Ibid., 323.
24 Ibid., 324.
river, abruptly separated from social life, alone in the middle of nature’s silent serenities, industrious but free.”

For landscape painters and printmakers working in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, the works of Daubigny and his Barbizon contemporaries illustrated the value of removing oneself – if only for the summer – from the pressures of modern, urban life.

Artists’ colonies were soon established across the northeast – from Cragsmoor, East Hampton, and Shinnecock in New York to Cos Cob and Old Lyme in Connecticut, Gloucester in Massachusetts, and New Hope in Pennsylvania – as well as out west in Taos, San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and Laguna Beach. Moreover, in 1883, French Impressionist painter Claude Monet moved to Giverny, France, where an art colony soon thrived, attracting hundreds of artists over the next three decades, the majority of whom were American. While artists gathered in these early colonies for a variety of artistic, social, and economic reasons, their growth was stimulated by the popularity of plein-air painting and printmaking. Art historian William Gerdts argues that these “rural communities and country towns, which offered picturesque subject matter, became new centers of artistic activity. Since these communities, unlike their urban counterparts, would have little or no indigenous artistic population, the visiting painters tended to congregate for both social and creative interchange.”

In an 1885 article on “The Summer Haunts of American Artists,” critic Lizzie W.

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26 Henriet quoted in Arnar, The Book As Instrument, 82.
28 On the art colony in Giverny, see Katherine M. Bourguignon, Impressionist Giverny, A Colony of Artists, 1885-1915 (Giverny: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2007).
Champney asserted that, “one can now scarcely make a summer excursion in any picturesque locality without encountering the white umbrellas and light portable easels of the nomad artist…Everywhere the whole wide new land invites her artist sons.” Champney described East Hampton as “a true artist colony, and perhaps the most popular of adjacent sketching grounds for New York artists.” Yet, as she continued,

This popularity is not entirely due to its accessibility, for its attractions are as pronounced and as varied as any of its more remote rivals…Nantucket is not more unique or Brittany more poetic. Here are the rural nooks for the landscape-painter delightfully English in sentiment. Here are the beach and sea panoramas, stormy cloud-battles or shimmering calm for the marine painter…here are salt sea-breezes and sunshine for all.

Champney’s description is accompanied by a wood engraving of the “Interior of Thomas Moran’s Studio, East Hampton, Long Island” (figure 5.6). The illustration provides a glimpse into the privileged space of the artist: on the left, a large landscape painting rests on an easel, while several framed and unframed canvases decorate the far right wall; a wooden staircase leads to a lofted balcony where small-scale works are hung salon style. Historic photographs of the studio (figures 5.7-5.8) reveal that these works are etchings, including works by Nimmo Moran, who captured East Hampton’s “rural nooks,” “beach and sea panoramas,” and “stormy cloud-battles.”

Prior to building their home-studio in 1884, the Morans boarded with year-round residents in East Hampton. Yet after renting in the town for four of the previous six summers,

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30 Lizzie W. Champney, “The Summer Haunts of American Artists,” The Century 30, no. 5 (October 1885): 845 and 860. Rattray later echoed Champney’s description noting that, “Art became the fashion for the entire summer colony. Farmers of East Hampton could hardly get out to their own barnyards to milk the cows, in the 1880’s [sic], the easels and mushroom-like umbrellas were so thick.” Rattray, Fifty Years of the Maidstone Club, 134.
31 Champney, 849.
32 In 1878, they stayed at the Gardner Hotel run by William Gardner, whose family had settled in East Hampton in the seventeenth century; in 1879 and 1880, they rented the Conkling House on Main Street from Phoebe Conkling Hunting, the aunt of U.S. Senator Roscoe Conkling; and in 1883 and 1884, they rented the house of David Green Mulford, located on Main Street near Buell Lane. Rattray, Fifty Years of the Maidstone Club, 49, 86, and 134; Robert Hefner, The Studio: The Home and Workshop of Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo Moran: Historic Structure Report (East Hampton: The Inc. Village of East Hampton, 2009), 2-5; and Thurman Wilkins, Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains, 2nd Rev. Ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 191-192 and 239.
they finally decided to establish a permanent residence.\textsuperscript{33} In November 1883 – seven months after Todd published his article on the “American Barbison” – the Morans purchased a plot of land measuring two-thirds of an acre on East Hampton’s Main Street. The deed, which is signed by Mary Nimmo Moran, indicates that the couple paid their soon-to-be neighbors Dr. Edward and Phoebe Osborn $1,500 for the property.\textsuperscript{34} That winter, Thomas Moran drew up plans for the couple’s new home-studio, laying the cornerstone on September 30, 1884.\textsuperscript{35} Gerdts notes that this was a “significant milestone” in the history of the art colony, since “the Morans clearly intended to establish themselves permanently, and their presence promoted continuity.”\textsuperscript{36}

The couple’s decision to settle in East Hampton was motivated by a variety of factors, at least one of which may have been financial. As early as 1880, the Long Island Railroad offered incentives to “new settlers” in the region. In a promotional handbook authored by Laffan, the company published a notice “to call attention of all in search of homes to the inducements offered to New Settlers on Long Island who will purchase land for Farming and Gardening and make improvements thereon, or purchase lots and build dwellings.” For the latter group, the railroad offered, “a free ticket for one year, fifty per cent [sic] reduction from Tariff rates for their house-hold effects, and free transportation for their families and servants, from Brooklyn or

\textsuperscript{33} The Morans made excursions to East Hampton in 1878, 1879, 1880, and 1883, but there is no documentation of the family visiting East Hampton in either 1881 or 1882. Instead, in the summer 1881, the Morans traveled first to Niagara Falls, on commission for \textit{Picturesque Canada}, and later to Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, on commission for \textit{Picturesque B\&O}. In August 1881, Moran traveled west to Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico, while Nimmo Moran visited family in Easton, Pennsylvania. In 1882, the Moran family spent six months in Great Britain, traveling to Scotland, England, and Wales. However, between 1883 and Nimmo Moran’s death in 1899, the family did not miss another summer in East Hampton.

\textsuperscript{34} Deed, Edward and Phoebe Osborn to Mary N. Moran, November 15, 1883, Deed Liber 278, page 363, Suffolk County Clerk’s Office quoted in Hefner, \textit{The Studio}, 5.

\textsuperscript{35} On September 9, 2013, Leander Arnold, a mason working on the restoration of the Morans’ home-studio, discovered a broken Ball canning jar in a foundation pier. The jar contained a document written to commemorate the laying of the studio’s cornerstone, which reads, in part: “Easthampton / Sept. 30\textsuperscript{th} / 1884 / The corner stone [sic] of this studio building was laid on this day at 10:30 A.M. in the presences of the following friends of the artist Thomas Moran.” Among the more than twenty individuals who signed the document was “M. Nimmo Moran.” Mark Segal, “A Surprise Find at the Moran House,” \textit{The East Hampton Star} (January 7, 2014), accessed online, August 1, 2015, http://easthamptonstar.com/Arts/ 2014107/Surprise-Find-Moran-House.

Long Island City, when moving. All building materials strictly for their own use in improving the property purchased by them, will be transported for New Settlers from Brooklyn or Long Island City at half Tariff rates for one year." The Morans may have taken advantage of this promotion (or a similar offer) when building their home-studio. In fact, Thomas Moran transported salvaged materials from demolished buildings in New York City, including doors, windows, pilasters, posts, handrails, balusters, and mantels to East Hampton aboard the Long Island Railroad.

In addition to the financial incentives of building a new home-studio on Long Island, the Morans were drawn to East Hampton’s landscape and natural topography, which was reminiscent of northern Europe. There are, for instance, geographic similarities between the East End and the flat lands of Holland, as both encompass broad expanses of land and sky, sand dunes, and numerous bodies of water. Moreover, East Hampton is well known for its historic windmills, a motif closely associated with Dutch landscape painting, especially the works of Rembrandt and Jacob van Ruysdael. The Morans often took advantage of this association, featuring flat barrens, dramatic skies, and windmills in their paintings and prints of the region. However, on a personal level, the couple was less interested in East Hampton’s connection to Holland than they were in its resemblance to the countryside of Great Britain. In 1872, Bunce compared East Hampton’s hills to “the open downs of England,” while Laffan and Strahan later remarked that “the woods rolled gloriously over the hills, wild as those around the Scotch lakes.”

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38 Hefner, The Studio, 9.
39 For a historical review of East Hampton’s windmills, see Jeannette Edwards Rattray, The Old Hook Mill and Other English Windmills of East Hampton, Long Island, New York, and Vicinity (East Hampton: East Hampton Board of Trustees, 1942) and Anne Frances Pulling and Gerald A. Leeds, Windmills and Watermills of Long Island (Charleston: Arcadia, 1999).
40 Bunce, 294 and Laffan and Strahan, 474-475.
Thomas Moran and Mary Nimmo, respectively – solidified the couple’s decision to call East Hampton home.

Art historian Anne Morand has argued that Thomas Moran was “at ease” in East Hampton: “Pressured neither by time nor by the necessity of fulfilling commissions, he could sketch what appealed to him. Florida had given him an appetite for the seashore, and Pennsylvania had fueled his love of rural countryside. Moran could satisfy both tastes on Long Island.” The topography of the East End also offered an interesting juxtaposition to the sublime western scenery that dominated Moran’s work in the 1870s. During his first trip to East Hampton, he filled a sketchbook with pencil studies featuring many of the same motifs – including windmills, farm houses, orchards, and ponds – that would reemerge in the painted and etched works that he and Nimmo Moran produced throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

Like her husband, Nimmo Moran was immediately drawn to the natural environs of East Hampton. The area was especially conducive to plein-air study, which had proven to be her preferred method of working. Moreover, she favored a personal and intimate approach to nature, focusing on small nooks and crannies – the “bits and nuggets” Laffan and Strahan described – rather than on dramatic sites or sublime views. Throughout the 1870s, her sketches, illustrations, and paintings reveal her preference for forest interiors, shady paths, lakes, and old bridges – motifs that were widely available in East Hampton. Writing in *The New York Times*, critic Charles De Kay noted that while Moran “found the even temperature and quiet landscapes of East Hampton just the kind he wanted,” Nimmo Moran “has found in the surrounding fields, lakes, and beaches capital subjects for the art of which she has a mastery – the art of etching.”

The accessibility of the landscape combined with the town’s pastoral character made it the ideal

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41 Morand, 49.
42 Ibid., 168-173
location for the artist to continue her careful and devoted study of nature.

The Morans typically spent six to seven months of the year in East Hampton, arriving in mid-May and leaving in mid-November. In the winter, they returned to New York City, where they maintained a studio.⁴⁴ Although the couple essentially split their time between the city and the country, they were often described in the press as “all-the-year-round residents” of East Hampton.⁴⁵ Their recurrent presence ushered in a new phase in the town’s history, first as a thriving artists’ colony and later as a popular tourist destination. It is useful to compare the evolution of East Hampton to that of Barbizon, for the two towns developed in a strikingly similar manner, albeit fifty years apart.

Art historian Nicholas Green has documented the “Parisian colonisation” of Barbizon, which he argues took place in three distinct phases: the first phase began in the 1820s, when artists and excursionists visited the Forest of Fontainebleau to study nature in the open air; the second phase began in the 1840s, when urban painters, printmakers, and photographers, including Jacques, Millet, and Rousseau, moved from Paris to Barbizon, establishing permanent homes in the village; the third phase began around mid-century, when the colony became a popular tourist destination, where, as Green notes, “the artists themselves were now perceived to be integral to nature…Trippers came to see them at work in the forest as much as the forest itself.”⁴⁶

Between 1870 and 1900, East Hampton progressed along a similar path. The earliest

⁴⁴ Between 1879 and 1883, the Morans’ rented a studio in Booth’s Theater Building on the southeast corner of West 23rd Street and 6th Avenue. In 1884, they moved to a new studio at 9 East 17th Street, where they remained for the next four years before relocating to 37 West 22nd Street in 1888. They maintained the studio at 37 West 22nd until Mary Nimmo Moran’s death in 1899, at which point Thomas Moran moved into “Mrs. Stimpson’s Boarding House” at 84 Irving Place.
⁴⁵ “Artists at East Hampton,” The East Hampton Star (August 2, 1890).
artists to arrive in the 1870s did not settle in the town, but instead visited its beaches to sketch out of doors. Following the construction of the Morans’ home-studio in 1884, the town attracted artists on a more permanent basis, including Howard Russell Butler, George Henry Smillie, William Whittemore, and Childe Hassam, who rented summer homes and established studios.\textsuperscript{47}

When the Long Island Railroad expanded its line to East Hampton and Montauk in 1895, the town’s transformation into a full-fledged tourist destination was complete and artists such as the Morans were among the main attractions.\textsuperscript{48} Although the earliest written descriptions of East Hampton focused on its untouched natural environs, by the 1890s critics were increasingly interested in the town’s well-known personalities.

The \textit{East Hampton Star} frequently reported upon the social and professional lives of the Morans, enhancing their status as local celebrities. In October 1890, the newspaper featured an article entitled “An Hour in a Studio,” which describes in detail – down to the rugs and furnishings – the experience of visiting the Morans’ “cosy and picturesque work-shop of art.” When the reporter “dropped into the studio,” he found Moran “working upon a Venetian painting which at once greatly interested us...the artist kindly left his work and showed us around his interesting studio.” The reporter noted that it was “an interesting sight to sit in the gallery and look down into the studio ornamented with scores of pictures and endless bric-a-brac.”\textsuperscript{49} The hour spent with the artist provides a behind-the-scenes look into the Morans’ studio, which in addition to the “gentle quality in East Hampton’s air and landscape” had become “one of the

\textsuperscript{47} For a list of artists living and working in East Hampton between 1850 and 1930, see Shipp, 31-36.

\textsuperscript{48} Even before the arrival of the railroad in 1895, the town was experiencing the ill effects of tourism, which were driving artists to other locations. In 1890, \textit{The East Hampton Star} reported that, “the artist colony of East Hampton this season promises to be as large as in other years. Comparatively few dwell in the village, however; it has become of late too fashionable, and the country round about possesses superior attractions and fewer distractions.” “Artists At East Hampton,” \textit{The East Hampton Star} (August 2, 1890).

\textsuperscript{49} “An Hour in a Studio,” \textit{The East Hampton Star} (October 18, 1890). In 1897, the \textit{New York Post} published an article “In Thomas Moran’s Studio,” which similarly describes the interior furnishings and art on display. Lucy Cleveland, “In Thomas Moran’s Studio,” \textit{New York Post} (October 30, 1897), reprinted in Hefner, \textit{The Studio}, 12-13.
noteworthy points of the town.”

East Hampton’s transformation from a rural community to an art colony to a tourist destination solidifies its status as the “American Barbizon.” Yet as the town transformed over time, artists and residents lamented the loss of its agrarian simplicity. The Morans were at the forefront of defending and protecting East Hampton against modernization and commercial development. There is an irony to their position, since the couple’s presence in the town – and notably their building of a home-studio in 1884 – set into motion many of the transformations they later decried. Similar to artists in Barbizon, such as Rousseau who ardently defended Fontainebleau against the state’s deforestation policy, Moran advocated for the protection of East Hampton’s natural resources.

In 1901, Moran protested the installation of telephone poles on Main Street, pressuring the town to install electric cables underground. The following year, when East Hampton’s Sea Spray Hotel was moved from Main Street to the oceanfront, Moran “sat all one day on a camp stool in the street with a gun across his knees, while the movers labored past Town Pond. If they broke off any limb of a group of silver poplars there, he swore he would shoot.” In a less dramatic fashion, the couple also exhibited and sold artworks to benefit the town: in 1890, The East Hampton Star reported that Moran exhibited a large painting titled “Icebergs in Mid Ocean” at the Clinton Academy to raise money for a beach walkway; in 1896, Nimmo Moran donated a group of etchings to be sold at the Village Improvement Fair organized by the Ladies’ Village Improvement Society, which aimed to preserve the “beauties which have made the name of old

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East Hampton known over nearly the whole of the United States.”

In the end, the Morans were able to preserve East Hampton best in their paintings and prints. In 1883, Todd asserted that the town’s “charm of old associations combined with pastoral simplicity is evanescent, and will soon be gone. Already the railroad, rude iconoclast, is approaching, to destroy the relics of the past and change the whole aspect of the place.” He concluded that, “the limner, therefore, who succeeds in depicting such features as are best worth preserving will not have performed an unappreciated task.” In her etchings of East Hampton – the “American Barbizon” – Nimmo Moran performed such a task, preserving its rural simplicity in the expressive prints that earned her critical acclaim and professional renown.

**East Hampton: The Etchings**

Between 1879 and 1899, the landscape of Long Island’s East End dominated Mary Nimmo Moran’s oeuvre. From a quantitative standpoint, she etched and painted more views of Long Island, New York than any other locale; from a qualitative standpoint, they are her most expressive, most experimental, and most popular works. As noted in Chapter Four, she etched her first Long Island landscape *Easthampton Barrens* in the summer 1879 (figures 4.26-4.30). *The East Hampton Star* praised this print for revealing, “the magic touch of the artist’s hand [which] has transmuted into poesy what would otherwise have been a rather common place subject.” The artist’s ability to find poetic expression in nature’s ordinary features and forms was a defining characteristic of her etchings. She focused on intimate moments and quiet corners of East Hampton’s landscape, presenting a vision of the town that is restful and peaceful, rustic and pastoral, and yet evocative of the past rather than the present.

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54 Todd, 322-323.
55 “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
When the Morans arrived in East Hampton, the town’s transition from an agricultural settlement to a modern summer resort was well underway: the remnants of its rural past – old homesteads, farms, and dirt roads – were quickly being replaced by new developments, including beachfront mansions, bathing houses, and golf courses. In many ways, East Hampton was a microcosm of the nation at large during the Gilded Age: between 1870 and 1900, the United States industrialized and urbanized at an explosive speed, as the country’s agrarian roots faded into distant memories. This transition was not without major social problems, from unemployment and poverty to political corruption and urban unrest. While some artists looked forward and embraced modernity, others looked backward in an attempt to escape, ignore, or delay the challenges and complexities of contemporary life.

The latter group of “backward looking” artists generally turned to the landscape – an emblem of an earlier, simpler era – in order to prolong “for one last generation,” writes art historian Wanda Corn, “the nineteenth century’s romantic search for the beautiful and the sublime in nature.” Corn continues:

To be sure, almost all the visual arts seemed ill-adapted to the burgeoning era of steam and steel. This discomfort is particularly evident in the artists with whom we are concerned. Although they often lived in cities, their work centered upon the landscape…Bearing the heritage of Emerson and Thoreau, artists such as George Inness, Dwight Tryon, Alexander Wyant, Ralph Blakelock and John Twachtman continued to be inspired by the quiet mystery and silent miracles of the natural world…Others, such as Edward Steichen, Clarence White and Gertrude Käsebier, created photographs to express similar subjective responses to nature. In their romantic outlook, these painters and photographers belonged more to the past than to the present.\(^\text{56}\)

The painters that Corn describes – those who lived in cities but painted landscapes and were discomforted by the rapidly changing world around them – are known in the history of American art as Tonalists and the style they adopted as Tonalism. The photographers who explored the

potential of expressing emotion through the making rather than taking of photographs are known as Pictorialists and their style as Pictorialism.

In her 1972 study *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880-1910*, Corn defined Tonalism not as a unified, conscious movement, but instead as “a style of intimacy and expressiveness, interpreting very specific themes in limited color scales and employing delicate effects of light to create vague, suggestive moods.” Unlike their Hudson River School predecessors, these artists were not interested in nature’s awe-inspiring grandeur. Instead, they depicted private, intimate scenes in order to convey their personal, subjective experiences in nature. They focused on what artist George Inness described as the “civilized landscape,” which stood in contrast to the wild, uncultivated terrain often featured in the paintings of the Hudson River School. Also known as the domestic landscape, the “civilized landscape” alluded to the human presence in nature through the inclusion of rural motifs, such as wooden fences, irregular walkways, fruit orchards, and weathered farmhouses. When figures are present, they are small, unobtrusive, and typically working the land.

Although these artists “looked backward” for subjects, themes, and motifs, Corn argues that they expressed themselves “in contemporary terms,” strategically employing light and tone to capture not only what they saw, but also what they felt in nature. In order to express and evoke emotion, they depicted gentle and seemingly ordinary landscapes at the “most suggestive moments – when burnt with the hues of autumn, at the break of dawn, in a clearing mist after rain or snow had bleached out sharp contrasts, or under the magic pall of night illumined by

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57 Corn, 4.
59 Corn, 1-2.
gaslamp or moonlight.” Rejecting the crisp, bright light of earlier American landscapes, Tonalists adopted the dim half-lights of dusk and dawn, when the sun lingers below the horizon and illuminates the sky in a soft, atmospheric haze. Corn notes that, “the subtle gradations of color, the predominance of one or two hues, and the diffused light were often so interrelated in these works that the overall effect was described simply as ‘tonal,’ ‘tonalistic,’ or even ‘tony.’”

The term “tonal” had at least two meanings at the end of the nineteenth century: on the one hand, it referred to the prevailing color of a picture to which all other colors were subordinated; on the other hand, it referred to the soft, atmospheric veil that enveloped all objects and forms within a picture. Oil painters achieved such effects by limiting their palette to low-toned, cool colors, notably gray and blue, which were blended on the canvas to create a harmonious surface. Although printmakers and photographers worked in monochromatic media, tonal effects could be achieved through various tools and techniques in order to simulate, as Corn writes, “the same soft, atmospheric light, moods of quiet intimacy, and sense of mystery and suggestiveness found in [Tonalist] paintings.”

In an era of constant change, pastoral landscapes bathed in soft light and harmonious tones were intended to evoke sentimental feelings of nostalgia and longing for a past that was quickly disappearing. “If one were to characterize in a word the feeling created by viewing such works, it might be ‘loss,’” Corn writes. “A pervasive though understated melancholy which these artists felt as their familiar world succumbed to alien and mechanical forces.” Gerdt has similarly argued that Inness and his contemporaries “were not concerned with transcription but

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60 Corn, 1.
61 Ibid., 3.
64 Corn, 13.
65 Ibid., 2.
with poetic evocation, suggesting in pure landscape the feelings of reverie and nostalgia, psychological states often associated with and induced by evening and night particularly.”⁶⁶ As a result, Tonalist works generally appealed to an urban clientele – those who were experiencing the dramatic social and economic changes of the era firsthand. These “fuzzy landscapes,” writes art historian Kevin Avery, offered audiences an escape to “a kind of heaven on earth, or the haven of dreams, or the higher harmony of the burgeoning universe, or merely the comfort of tradition, which the Tonalists claimed to uphold.”⁶⁷

Mary Nimmo Moran was among the artists whose landscapes “belonged more to the past than to the present.” Unlike earlier artists in East Hampton – including Homer, Henry, and Weir who painted Long Island’s beaches overrun with tourists – she depicted the town untouched by modern leisure and commercial development. She did not etch nature in its uncultivated, primeval state, but instead focused on the “civilized landscape,” alluding to the human presence through the inclusion of windmills, pathways, homesteads, and sailboats.⁶⁸ Her scenes are often devoid of figures, yet when present they appear to be at one with nature, working the land, herding livestock, or peacefully observing the scene as a surrogate for the viewer.

Exploring the expressive potential of light and weather conditions, she etched nature at twilight and at dusk, during rainstorms and under cloudy skies, enveloped in the pall of evening and the bright light of morning. She employed an array of printmaking tools and techniques to enhance tonal effects, strategically manipulating the medium to capture her subjective impressions of nature. While she expressed herself in contemporary terms, utilizing tone, light, and the recently “revived” medium of etching to convey personal experiences, her focus on East

⁶⁷ Avery, 10.
⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.
Hampton’s unspoiled landscape and agrarian lifeways imbued her prints with nostalgia, as she preserved and idealized the pre-industrial past as it was beginning to disappear. Her approach to East Hampton’s landscape departs from some of her earlier depictions of Easton and Newark, in which she included references to industrial development. In the 1870s, she often drew, etched, and painted landscapes that feature railroad tracks, bridges, freight cars, factories, smokestacks, steamships, and telegraph poles. Yet she did not pursue similar subject matter in East Hampton, instead turning her attention to nature untouched by modern encroachments.

This shift may have had less to do with her own changing interests than with her astute understanding of the art market. In the wake of the Civil War and the Centennial Exhibition, there was a growing market for Barbizon and Barbizon-inspired art. The War had shattered myths of innocence and optimism and, as a result, highly detailed, awe inspiring, grandiose depictions of the American landscape fell out of favor with critics and collectors, who instead preferred small, personal, and intimate views of nature.69 The Morans were well aware of shifting tastes and trends, evidenced perhaps most clearly by Moran’s statement: “I prefer to paint western scenes, but the Eastern people don’t appreciate the grand scenery of the Rockies. They are not familiar with mountain effects and it is much easier to sell a picture of a Long Island swamp than the grandest picture of the Colorado.”70 Nimmo Moran may have similarly realized that the market for industrial American landscapes was quite limited, especially given the difficulties she faced when trying to sell Newark from the Meadows (figure 2.48).

Nimmo Moran spent her first full summer in East Hampton in 1880, during which time she executed five new plates, including Solitude (figure 5.9), Sandy Paths, Easthampton (figure 5.10), Three Mile Harbor (figure 5.11), An Old Homestead, Easthampton (figure 5.12), and

Together, these works convey the rural simplicity of the East End, focusing on its winding paths, irregular trees, rocky hillsides, and cloud swept skies. *Solitude* and *Sandy Paths* were drawn from within the forest interior, emphasizing the density and ruggedness of the surrounding foliage. Although devoid of the human presence, these scenes are very much alive, as she captured the energy of the landscape in her writhing etched lines. In *Solitude*, tree branches rise from the earth with great vitality, bending and twisting against the sky, while the clouds in *Sandy Paths* sweep diagonally across the composition to emulate the atmospheric effect of a billowing wind.

Both prints place the viewer in close proximity to the natural elements, as Nimmo Moran aimed to recreate in ink on paper her personal experience of being in nature – capturing light effects and weather conditions, tactile sensations and emotional impressions. She often alluded to the emotional import of her works in her titles, as evidenced in *Solitude*, which communicates the sense of remote seclusion she experienced when drawing the scene on grounded copper. Her seclusion, however, should not be confused with loneliness or desolation, for nature’s solitude was believed to provide peace and restfulness from the chaos of modern life. Nimmo Moran and, by extension, the viewer escapes into nature, which she depicts as a tranquil refuge.

In 1881, *Solitude* was published in *The American Art Review*, where editor Sylvester Rosa Koehler described it as “among her most successful plates.” He also commended her ability to recreate in monochrome “the vivid suggestion of color, and the feeling of light and air, as if a sunshiny but windy day, when cloud shadows are scattered all over the landscape and break up its unity.” He may have had *Sandy Paths* in mind when writing this description, for

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the work successfully reproduces bright light and wispy clouds of a sunny day. The diagonal hatching in the sky imparts a sense of motion and depth, since the lines are visibly thinner and lighter than those of the foreground foliage.

To achieve this effect Nimmo Moran used the stopping-out process: after submerging her plate in acid for a period of time, she removed the plate, washed and dried it, and then applied an acid-resistant varnish over the lines in the sky to prevent further biting. The plate was then returned to the acid, which continued to eat the unvarnished areas. The lines that were exposed to acid longer, notably those of the path and foliage, were deeply bitten and held more ink, therefore printing darker. In contrast, the lines in the sky, which were exposed to acid for a shorter period of time, were shallow and held less ink, therefore printing lighter. The result mirrors the effect of aerial or atmospheric perspective, as motifs in the distance appear lighter, of lower contrast, and thus farther away.

Nimmo Moran adopted this technique in several prints, including *Summer, Easthampton* (1883, figure 5.14) and *Looking Seaward, Long Lane, Easthampton* (1884, figure 5.15), in which she strategically stopped out areas of the plate to control the bite time and the depth of the etched lines. In *Summer, Easthampton*, she created a clear spatial differentiation between the foreground foliage – the lines of which were deeply bitten and richly inked – and the central scene of a windmill and farmhouse, which was exposed to acid for a shorter period of time, thereby printing lighter and appearing farther away. In *Looking Seaward, Long Lane, Easthampton*, the landscape fades as it recedes to the horizon, an effect she achieved by shortening the bite time of distant motifs. A detail of the print’s upper right corner (figure 5.16) reveals the subtlety of her approach:

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73 Alternatively, Nimmo Moran may have varied the depth of her line by removing her plate from the acid bath and drawing the lines in the sky into the ground after the foreground was already well bitten. The plate would have then been returned to the acid, which bit both the new and existing lines, making the existing ones even deeper. For a description of both processes, see Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints: A Complete Guide to Manual and Mechanical Processes from Woodcut to Ink Jet* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 10b and 10c.
as our eye moves from the foreground trees to the marshland in the middle distance and the sailboats on the horizon, the etched lines thin, the ink saturation fades, and the forms become increasingly indistinct. One can also discern these differences when examining the cancelled copper plate, for the etched lines of the sailboats on the horizon are nearly imperceptible.\textsuperscript{74}

In addition to altering bite time, the artist adeptly inked and wiped her plates to reproduce atmospheric effects. \textit{The Goose Pond, Easthampton}, which was selected as her diploma etching following her election to London’s Society of Painter-Etchers in 1881, is one notable example: in a heavily inked impression of the plate (figure 5.17), the clouds are nearly as dark as the foreground motifs, resulting in a rather flat, one-dimensional image. A graphite inscription on this impression reads, “Wipe the sky,” indicating that the artist was dissatisfied with this heavy-handed, even printing. In a more nuanced impression (figure 5.18), the lines in the sky were thoroughly wiped, drawing out substantially more ink, and creating a clear distinction between the foreground scene and the distant clouds. This differentiation is subtle but important, for it establishes a naturalistic sense of depth in the landscape.

Nimmo Moran also worked extensively with plate tone – a printing technique in which a thin layer of ink is left on the surface of the plate in order to create tonal washes, add color, or develop light effects. In \textit{Near the Beach, Easthampton} (1881, figure 5.19), she enveloped nearly the entire scene in a thin layer of plate tone, which washes over the landscape, softening the contrast between etched lines and unmarked plate. She deftly wiped the sky, which subtly fades from dark to light revealing the white of the paper just above the horizon line. This creates a bright highlight in the landscape where the sun has escaped the clouds. She similarly inked an

\textsuperscript{74} The Gilcrease Museum owns six of Mary Nimmo Moran’s cancelled copper plates, including \textit{Southampton Village and Pond with Cows} (1888, 19.70), \textit{The Haunted House, Easthampton} (1886, 19.71), \textit{A Florida Forest} (1887, 19.72), \textit{The Borders of Lake Isabel, Florida} (1887, 19.73), \textit{Point Isabel, Florida} (1887, 19.74), and \textit{Looking Seaward, Long Lane, Easthampton} (1884, 19.75). Thomas Moran may have cancelled these plates after her death in order to prevent the unauthorized printing of new impressions.
impression of *Swamp Grasses, Easthampton* (1884, figure 5.21), in which a thin film of brown ink veils the scene in a soft tonality. The plate tone was evenly applied over the composition, but strategically wiped clean across the horizon, drawing our eye to the distance and effectively evoking the light of dawn or dusk.

Plate tone was an important means by which Nimmo Moran developed nuanced distinctions between light and shade, adding tonal variations and areas of color to her monochromatic etchings. She often complemented her application of plate tone with *retroussage*, a printing technique in which a soft cloth is run over an inked plate, drawing up the ink and softening the etched lines. In *Near the Beach* (figure 5.19) and *Swamp Grasses* (figure 5.21), she used *retroussage* to blur the hard edges of the foreground foliage, mimicking the soft texture of the vegetation. She also danced the cloth over the densely etched areas of the plates, drawing ink out of the lines to thicken the foliage and produce shadows. In a detail of the right foreground of *Near the Beach* (figure 5.20), one can see where the ink has been drawn out and spread over the surface of the plate. The ink fills the space between the etched lines with tone, which in the final image reads as tufts of grass or clusters of leaves.

As noted in Chapter Four, artistic or “artificial” printing techniques – including both plate tone and *retroussage* – enabled the artist to produce prints that were not only original and unique, but also poetic and expressive. When used in conjunction with printmaking tools, such as Scotch stone, the roulette, sandpaper, and drypoint, Nimmo Moran could effectively capture dramatic light, atmospheric effects, meteorological conditions, and textural distinctions that she observed in nature in different seasons and at various times of day.

In addition to *Summer, Easthampton* (1883, figure 5.14), she also etched *Springtime, Easthampton* (1882, figure 5.22), a work that was, according to print dealer Christian Klackner,
an “excellent indication of the comparative barrenness of the season.” Although the landscape is not as lush and verdant as her summer scene, the work captures the light of spring, as the sun radiates between the trees and over the horizon. When printed, this area of the plate was wiped clean of ink, allowing the unmarked paper to produce the illusion of bright light on a spring day. She similarly exploited the white of the paper to render light effects in *Twilight, Easthampton* (1880, figure 5.13), where it was used to capture the soft, glowing light that emanates from the sun as it sinks below the horizon. The area of unmarked paper just over the horizon contrasts with the sky above, where she applied a thin layer of plate tone over the etched lines of the clouds, enveloping the scene in a soft tonality as daylight fades to darkness.

Nimmo Moran also used a Scotch stone and the roulette to heighten tonal effects in *Twilight*. An abrasive stick used to grind away areas of the plate, Scotch stone leaves behind a series of fine scratches that hold ink and print tone. In the foreground path of *Twilight*, she rubbed a Scotch stone over the plate to create a lattice of thin scratches that when inked and printed create a light tonal wash. She then used a roulette to create even darker areas of tone: composed of a toothed wheel on a handle, the roulette can be run over a grounded or ungrounded plate to produce patterns of small dots, which hold ink and print as gradated tone.

Unlike the subtractive process of mezzotint, roulette work is an additive technique and was preferred by Nimmo Moran since it could be applied quickly and freely. In *Twilight*, the artist ran a roulette over the trees and foliage that frame the composition on the left and right, and horizontally across the path to cast dramatic shadows. Also visible in the foreground of the plate

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76 In a letter to Sylvester Rosa Koehler, Thomas Moran similarly noted his preference for the roulette, explaining: “For my part I cannot see any difference between the work of the rocker & the roulette. The roulette is more under your control.” Thomas Moran, letter to Sylvester Rosa Koehler, June 29, 1883, Volume 5 (M-N), S.R. Koehler Papers, 1837-1900, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, Washington, D.C.
are finger and/or palm prints, resulting from the artist wiping the plate with the palm of her hand, a common practice for removing ink from the surface of the plate and one that further underscores her desire to emphasize the “hand of the artist” in each impression.  

Critics often praised the artist’s skilled use of printmaking tools and techniques: in 1881, Koehler described *Twilight* as “a plate of extraordinary power and beauty – the effect has been heightened by use of the roulette and by stoning, but without any sacrifice of either strength or harmony.” Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer similarly commended her “extensive but well-calculated use of the roulette to produce effects of tone,” while *The Critic* declared that, “Of Mrs. Moran’s works we like best those in which mezzotint or some equivalent process has been used to help out the etched lines.” Two decades later, curator Frank Weitenkampf highlighted the artist’s successful use of “the roulette in various plates, and ‘Scotch stone’ (a substance used to reduce plates) in *Twilight, Easthampton*” in his influential history of American printmaking. 

Others, however, perceived the use of printmaking tools such as the roulette as a sign of weakness, concealing an artist’s inability to achieve similar effects with the etching needle. French printmaker Maxime Lalanne advanced this position in his *Treatise on Etching*, writing: “The latitude which I give you does not extend to the point of approving all material resources without any exception. There is one which I shall not permit you to make use of, as the needle has enough resources of its own to be able to do without it. I allude to the roulette, which finds its natural application in other species of engraving.”

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77 Artist-historian Stephen Fredericks identified the presence of finger and/or palm prints in this etching. Stephen Fredericks, email to the author, October 20, 2015.
At times, Nimmo Moran was criticized for her dependence on the roulette: a critic reviewing the 1882 annual exhibition of the New York Etching Club argued that, “The work of Mrs. Moran is charming, especially in her skies. She can use the point so effectively that we could wish she would abandon the roulette altogether.”\footnote{82 “The Etching Club’s Exhibition,” \textit{The Art Amateur} 6, no. 4 (March 1882): 70. Nimmo Moran exhibited eleven works in the 1882 annual exhibition of the New York Etching Club, including \textit{Twilight, Easthampton}. She also executed a small plate version of this print for inclusion in the exhibition catalogue. For a full list of the works she exhibited in the show, see cat. nos. 138-148 in \textit{Catalogue of the New York Etching Club Exhibition} (New York: The Club, 1882), 11.} Five years later, the \textit{Boston Evening Transcript} similarly remarked, “She employs the roulette occasionally, where it appears as if she might have obtained what she sought just as well if not better with the needle.”\footnote{83 “American Women Etchers: Exhibition of Their Work at the Museum of Fine Arts,” \textit{The Boston Evening Transcript} (November 1, 1887): 1.} Critical aversion to her use of the roulette may reflect the tool’s association with commercial, rather than fine art, printmaking. Nevertheless, Nimmo Moran continued to use the roulette in conjunction with other tools and techniques in order to push the tonal and painterly possibilities of the medium. Her willingness to experiment reflects her status as an essentially self-taught printmaker: since she was not formally trained in an academy, atelier, or printmaking studio, she did not feel compelled to abide by “rules” or conventions. Moreover, she adopted a personal and inventive approach to etching in pursuit of originality – the defining characteristic of the etching “revival.” Yet, as Weitenkampf later argued, she “never lost herself in petty delight over technic for technic’s sake. It is the pictorial effect which occupied her.”\footnote{84 Frank Weitenkampf, “Some Women Etchers,” \textit{Scribner’s Magazine} 46, no. 6 (December 1909): 732.}

When adding roulette work to prints such as \textit{Between the Sand Dunes} (1881, figure 5.23) and \textit{A Stormy Evening, Easthampton} (1883, figure 5.25), she was primarily concerned with using the tool to recreate the light and atmospheric effects of an approaching storm. In the first state of \textit{Between the Sand Dunes} (figure 5.23), she used the etching needle to draw dramatic cloud forms in the sky and rainfall in the distance, creating shadows through dense hatching and cross-
hatching. However, in the second state of the plate (figure 5.24), she added roulette work to the storm cloud on the horizon, heightening the drama of the scene by enhancing light and dark contrasts. In *A Stormy Evening, Easthampton* (figure 5.25), the roulette was rolled over the sky enveloping the clouds in a rich tonality. Rain appears imminent and darkness falls over the village of East Hampton, which she veiled in a thin layer of plate tone. The sky over the horizon and the windmill’s right panel were wiped clean, creating bright highlights in an otherwise nebulous landscape.

Among the artist’s prints most “highly prized by the fortunate possessors” was “*’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame*” (1883, figure 5.26). In a letter to Koehler written on behalf of his wife, Moran explained that title refers to the time of day “between twilight & darkness when the cattle or cows come home.” In order to successfully render the nuanced light effects that occur between the gloaming and the murk, Nimmo Moran employed the roulette, which she ran over the clouds, windmill, steeple, farmhouses, hillside, bridge, and foreground path. Only the water and sliver of sky above the horizon were left untouched. Several impressions of this plate were printed in brown ink on either cream or ivory paper, enhancing the warmth and richness of the scene (figure 5.27).

As in *Twilight* and *Stormy Evening*, the artist strategically employed the roulette in “*’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk*” to evoke, as one critic wrote, “the hush of eventide [that] broods over the dying day.” Comparing the final state of the plate to a trial proof (figure 5.28) reveals the tool’s ability to drastically alter the mood of a scene. The trial proof was pulled prior to roulette additions and is comprised solely of etched lines. The overall impression is one of

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85 “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
87 “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
light and air, as if drawn at midday when the landscape was evenly lit. The clean, thorough wipping of the plate enables one to study the details of the image, which are somewhat obscured by the heavy plate tone and roulette work: a figure on horseback herds two cows up the hill – an anecdotal detail that is nearly imperceptible in the final state. Despite the picturesque quality of the proof, it lacks the emotion and drama that gives force and character to the finished etching.

The print’s title was drawn from a popular Scottish song, several verses of which were reproduced alongside the etching when it was first published in the luxury print portfolio

*Original Etchings by American Artists* (1883), edited by Koehler:

Come all ye jolly shepherds / That whistle thro’ the glen, / I’ll tell you o’ a secret / That courtiers dinna ken. / What is the greatest bliss / That the tounge o’ man can name? / ‘Tis to woo a bonnie lassie / When the kye come hame, / When the kye come hame,/ ‘Tween the gloamin’ and the mirk, / When the kye come hame. 88

In his accompanying description, Koehler explained that although “Mrs. Moran’s luminous etching was inspired by the old Scotch song…The motive of the etching was supplied by the scenery of Long Island, where Mrs. Moran usually spends her summers.” 89 He did not identify the site as East Hampton, for he had received a letter from Moran indicating that, “Mrs. M does not wish the locality named because the name Easthampton has become so hackneyed. You might say that it was etched from nature on the Long Island coast, which would give it enough

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88 Sylvester Rosa Koehler, ed., *Original Etchings by American Artists* (New York: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1883). This portfolio included twenty original etchings by members of the New York Etching Club. In 1885, the prints were reissued along with the works featured in *Twenty Original Etchings* (1884) in an eight-part luxury portfolio titled *Gems of American Etchers* (New York: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1885). Nimmo Moran’s “‘Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk” was republished in the eighth section of *Gems of American Etchers*, along with the following four prints: Thomas Moran’s *The Castle of San Juan De Ulua, Vera Cruz*; Charles A. Platt’s *Canal Boats on the Thames*; Frederic S. Church’s *A Symphony, Nineteenth Century*; and M.F.H. DeHaas’s *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Scheveningen*.

89 Sylvester Rosa Koehler, “‘Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame.’ Mrs. M. Nimmo Moran,” in *Original Etchings by American Artists*. 
locality.” The notion that East Hampton was a “hackneyed” name reflects the town’s growing popularity as an art colony and summer destination, overused by artists and overrun by tourists.

When describing the artist’s technical approach, Koehler notes that “she prefers to give effect to her plates with the rocker or the roulette – the latter in the present case – rather than depend entirely on line.” Her preference for tone over line led Weitenkampf to characterize her work as “painter-etching with the accent on ‘painter,’” and Klackner declared “’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk” to be “one of the finest plates the artist has produced. It shows in a most marked degree the intense appreciation of those broad and simple qualities that especially distinguish the works of the true painter-etcher.”

While she experimented with Scotch stone, the roulette, plate tone, and retroussage to create expressive areas of tone and color, evoking the light of evening or the conditions of a storm, she simultaneously explored the tonal possibilities of pure line etching. In 1881, she executed Evening, Easthampton (1881, figures 5.29-5.31) – a work that captures the “colorful effect of the setting sun” without the application of the roulette. The print depicts the same bridge, path, hillside, and windmill later featured in “’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk,” yet slightly earlier in the day, before the sun has set below the horizon.

In the first state of the plate, she used simple hatching to outline the circular form of the sun (figure 5.29), but subsequently reworked the sky, adding a more elaborate grid of cross-hatching over the horizon to enhance the coloration (figure 5.30). She adopted a similar method when etching Evening on the St. John’s River, Florida (1882, figure 5.32), adding dense cross-

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91 Koehler, “’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame.’ Mrs. M. Nimmo Moran,” in Original Etchings by American Artists.
93 Klackner 18. In the second state of the plate, Nimmo Moran added roulette work to the bridge, but not to the sky.
hatching over the water to create an area of tone that contrasts with a perfectly round section of unmarked plate – what Klackner described as the “coppery sun declining in banks of cloud.”

Although Nimmo Moran used cross-hatching rather than the roulette to depict the light of the setting sun, *Evening, Easthampton* and *Evening on the St. John’s River, Florida* are not pure line etchings in the true sense of the term, for the artist applied expressive plate tone when printing impressions of both plates.

In one impression of *Evening, Easthampton* (figure 5.31), she strategically wiped ink on the surface of the plate to create a “v” shape in the sky. This manipulation of plate tone boldly illuminates the landscapes, adding a bit of sublime drama to an otherwise ordinary and peaceful scene. She did, however, adopt a more conventional approach to pure line etching in works such as *The Haunt of the Muskrat, Easthampton* (1884, figure 5.33), *Hook Pond, Easthampton, L.I.* (1884, figure 5.34), and *The Edge of Georgica Pond, L.I.* (1885, figure 5.35). All three prints depict East Hampton at midday, rather than at twilight or in the evening, which may account for the artist’s decision to rely on line with minimal plate tone and ink manipulation.

In 1885, Koehler included *The Haunt of the Muskrat, Easthampton* (figure 5.33) in his publication *Etching: An Outline of its Technical Processes and its History*. The work was one of thirty prints by “Old and Modern Etchers,” including Rembrandt, Jacque, Meryon, Lalanne, Whistler, Otto Bacher, James D. Smillie, and Henry Farrer. When selecting plates by American artists, Koehler had two requirements for inclusion:

- Technical variety, and intellectual significance. That the former has been attained is easily seen. But it will also be found, I hope, that each of these plates has something to

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94 Klackner, 19. *Evening on the St. John’s River, Florida* is dated 1882 and was likely inspired by the pencil studies and watercolors the artist executed on her trip to Florida with husband Thomas Moran in 1877. The couple traveled again to Florida in 1887, but there is no evidence that either artist was there in 1882 when *Evening on the St. John’s River* was executed. See Chapter Two of this dissertation for a discussion of their first trip to Florida in 1877 and Chapter Six for a discussion of their second trip in 1887.

say, – that each of them expresses some feeling or some sentiment…The feeling for nature, however, is strong within us, and we are ever responsive to her moods. That etching is capable of expressing a great variety of these moods is, I believe, likewise shown by the plates in question.\textsuperscript{96}

Although Nimmo Moran was already well known for her painterly prints and skilled use of tonal techniques,  
*The Haunt of the Muskrat* was cited as an example “of the use of the undisguised line, softened only by the mellowing which results from printing. Its fine perspective, and the out-of-door feeling which pervades it, do not need special pointing out. As one of the remarkable qualities of Mrs. Moran’s work is to be noted her bold and effective treatment of skies, and this quality is prominent also in the plate under discussion.”\textsuperscript{97}

Composed of free, idiosyncratic lines, *The Haunt of the Muskrat* was naturally printed to convey a sense of bright light and open air – “the out-of-door feeling” characteristic of East Hampton in the summer months. Writing in 1899, the unnamed author of Nimmo Moran’s obituary in *The East Hampton Star* recalled the artist working on the plate *en plein air*:

> “The Haunt of the Mus-rat” is one of Mrs. Moran’s favorites among her smaller etchings. It was made from a rowboat on the upper part of Hook Pond among the beautiful reeds and grasses and flags which used to grow on the shores of the pond before the ruthless golfers came and mowed away all these lovely children of the marshes and fens and threw their inartistic and obstructive foot-bridge across the upper lagoons of the pond, and well do some of the young people of the old East Hampton days which are no more, remember the pleasure of taking Mrs. Moran out in the boat to make this etching. The artist often let her young friends take her etching needle and make a tuft of grass or a leaf on her plate so that they might proudly feel they had a real part in the picture in which they took such a deep interest.\textsuperscript{98}

In the final image, the viewer takes his/her place next to Nimmo Moran in the rowboat surrounded by the vegetation that once lined the shores of Hook Pond. This description also reveals the overwhelming sense of nostalgia her etchings evoked for “the old East Hampton days which are no more.”

\textsuperscript{96} Koehler, *Etching*, 159.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{98} “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
When etching *Hook Pond, Easthampton* (figure 5.34) and *The Edge of Georgica Pond* (figure 5.35), she also worked almost exclusively with line, naturally printing impressions. *Hook Pond* is among the artist’s most elemental etchings: she distilled the landscape down to its most basic components of earth, water, and air. The top half of the plate was left untouched, allowing the unmarked paper to connote clear sky. Klackner praised the image as “remarkable” for its “fine natural balance of the masses of the subject and for the simple and characteristic treatment of the foreground.”99 The print reveals her discerning powers of selection, which are also evident in *The Edge of Georgica Pond*, where the artist juxtaposed the density of the vegetation on the left with the sparsity of the water and sky on the right. As in *Hook Pond*, she added a few fine lines to indicate subtle ripples or reflections on the surface of the water, leading Klackner to declare the print an “exceptionally fine example of pure line; especially subtle and effective in the simplicity of its details.”100

When reviewing the artist’s etched oeuvre in 1889, critic Alfred Trumble highlighted her ability to condense, refine, and simplify the natural landscape into artful compositions: “She has not only contemplated the surface, but has fathomed the depths of her material, and learned to reduce the most complicated combinations to organic foundations, and to represent them with a noble simplicity of touch which, while full of power, is also replete with delicate suggestiveness.” Yet the apparent “simplicity” of her work is not representative of the time or labor that went into producing a plate. As Trumble argued, her ability to simplify her compositions was an indication of her skill as an etcher: “Where feebler and more laborious hands would give us mechanical combinations of lines, as futile substitutes for foliage and sky, she gives us real verdue and

99 Klackner, 20.
100 Ibid., 21. Klackner deposited the first state of the plate for copyright on April 15, 1886. The deposited impression is in the collection of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
sunlight, apparently without an effort, because her knowledge aids her in the most perfect of all arts, the art of concealing labor while achieving its perfected fruits.”

When compared with her painterly prints, Nimmo Moran’s pure line etchings reveal that she explored the manifold possibilities of medium. Although critics often preferred one approach to another, the artist was astutely aware of the advantages of each method. Her imagery typically dictated her approach and she selected the most effective tools and techniques for conveying her personal impressions of nature: storm clouds and twilight called for the roulette, plate tone, and retoussage, while sunny days and wind swept skies called for line work, simplified forms, and natural printing.

She adopted the latter approach when etching Garden’s Bay L.I., Seen From Fresh Pond (1884, figure 5.36). The print was first published in the luxury portfolio Gems of American Etchers, edited by Koehler in collaboration with the New York Etching Club. The print appears in the seventh installment of the portfolio along with a lengthy description of the locale and the artist’s technique. Koehler contrasted Nimmo Moran’s etching to the “twilight effects of Messrs. Pennell and Farrer…and the sad ‘Solitude’ of Miss [Edith Loring] Peirce [Getchell].” He argued that Garden’s Bay L.I.,

…gives us the brilliant, dazzling effect of a clear, bright day with a strong sunlight, peculiarly exhilarating and almost exciting in its freshness. The etching is simply printed in brown, but the imagination involuntarily supplies the color, from the deep green of the foliage washed by recent rains, and the clear blue of the cloud-studded heavens, to the warm tints of the sandbank, and the blinding white light reflected by the great cumuli gathering above the horizon.

Inspired by her detailed observation of East Hampton’s landscape, the print reveals her concern for capturing the light, color, and mood of the scene under a specific set of natural circumstances.

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In addition to season and hour, light and atmosphere, tone and color, Nimmo Moran recorded the textural nuances of the landscapes she etched. She adeptly altered the length, depth, and style of her etched lines to convey different textures and forms: short, choppy strokes for leaves; longer, angular lines for grass; irregular, wavy contours for dried earth. She also adopted an array of auxiliary tools to depict textural variety. When depicting areas of sand or soil, as seen in the foreground of *Sandy Paths, Easthampton* (figure 5.10), she applied what printmaker Nancy Friese has described as the “sand manner.” With this technique, a piece of sandpaper is placed face down on a grounded etching plate. The artist then rubs a burnisher over the back of the sandpaper, pressing the abrasive surface into the ground to create small, stippled indentations, which when bitten, inked, and printed recreate the granular appearance of sand or soil.

She appropriately employed this technique when etching views of the sand dunes along East Hampton’s oceanfront. In *Study of Scrub Oak, Amagansett* (1881, figure 5.37), the artist applied the “sand manner” to emulate the gritty texture of the sand dune in the foreground of the plate (figure 5.38). Her use of this technique went against the advice of established painter-etchers, including Lalanne, who warned artists to be “distrustful of tints obtained by rubbing the copper with sandpaper; these tints generally show in the proof as muddy spots, and are wanting in freshness. Avoid the process, because of its difficulty of application. Only a very skilful [sic] engraver can put it to good uses.” Klackner, however, highlighted her successful application of

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104 Friese also describes an alternative approach to this method in which the artist “is to place sand on the still-tacky ground and, when the ground dries, trace a drawing with a burnisher over the plate, thus pushing the grains of sand through the ground.” However, Nimmo Moran is not known to have transferred her drawings directly onto plates and thus most likely used sandpaper, rather than sand, to create this effect. Ibid.

105 Lalanne, 50.
the technique in *Study of Scrub Oak*, describing her “simple yet effective indication of the foreground sand, with tussocks of beach grass” as “especially noteworthy.”

In addition to the sand manner, she often used drypoint to add textural details to her compositions. Drypoint is the quickest way of incising a metal plate: an artist uses a needle-like point to scratch lines directly into the surface of the copper. This creates a rough, raised edge around the line, also known as the burr, which holds substantially more ink and prints a rich, velvety line. In *Study of Scrub Oaks*, drypoint additions were drawn to emulate the texture of beach grass in the sand dune. The softness of the drypoint line effectively mimics the softness of grass, creating bold accents in the foreground of the composition. She also applied an even wash of plate tone over the dune, which not only simulates the color of sand, but also contrasts with the sky, notably the area seen through the trees where the plate has been wiped clean. Here the white of the paper is visible, producing the effect of light on the horizon. The composition gradually fades as it approaches the edges of the plate, creating the softened effect of a vignette. Yet the artist cleverly reminds the viewer that we are looking at a pictorial representation of nature by including a thin border around the image, which she etched into the plate thereby enclosing the scene in a frame.

Although at first glance *Study of Scrub Oak, Amagansett* appears entirely devoid of the human presence, upon close examination the viewer will discover the roof of a farmhouse peeking through the high weeds of the distant meadow. The inclusion of this minute detail is not central to the scene, but it was precisely the type of detail that would have thrilled the connoisseur, who relished in discovering hidden “gems” in printed imagery. Moreover, this detail emphasizes the importance of close observation, for Nimmo Moran’s prints reward careful

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106 Klackner, 19.
107 Gascoigne, 11.
looking. She often concealed small anecdotal details amidst densely etched areas of the plate: for example, in *A City Farm, New York* (1881, figures 5.39-5.40), she drew two female figures picking vegetables in a garden, their rounded backs and heads mirroring the shape of the cabbages they harvest. Moreover, in both *Twilight* (figure 5.13) and “‘Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk” (figure 5.26), she enveloped farmhouses, windmills, figures, and livestock in tone, dissolving the motifs into the surrounding landscape.

From a symbolic standpoint, the merging of figures and farmhouses with the landscape presents an idealized vision of America’s agrarian past, when men and women lived harmoniously in nature. From a practical standpoint, Nimmo Moran’s “hidden” details indicate her astute understanding of the context of consumption: etchings were often consumed in a private, domestic setting, where the viewer held the print in his/her hand. This allowed for close, careful examination, enabling the viewer to discover small, nearly imperceptible details over an extended period of time. It was an intimate viewing experience and one that was enhanced by the small size of painter-etchings. Prior to 1884, Nimmo Moran’s largest print measured 12 inches high by 9-3/4 inches wide – slightly larger than a sheet of notebook paper (figure 1.1). Collectors typically stored etchings of this size in personal portfolios, removing them for study or display when hosting guests.

In the late 1880s, Nimmo Moran experimented with etching on a larger scale producing prints such as *Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond* (1887, figure 6.25), which measures 19-1/2 inches high by 30-3/4 inches wide. However, the overwhelming majority of her plates were less than half that size, measuring anywhere from 1-7/8 inches by 4-1/4 inches (figure 4.3) to 7-1/2 inches by 11-1/2 inches (figure 5.26). The artist preferred to work on a smaller scale for multiple reasons. Aesthetically, small plates complemented her intimate approach to nature and

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108 Nimmo Moran’s large-scale etchings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.
enhanced the personal viewing experience: an intimate landscape drawn on a small plate has the ability to evoke strong emotions in the viewer, who is immersed in the print and, by extension, the landscape depicted therein. Practically, small plates were easier to transport out of doors, which was Nimmo Moran’s preferred method of working. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, she demonstrated a commitment to studying nature en plein air or in the open air – a practice she continued to pursue in her East Hampton etchings of the 1880s.

Nimmo Moran’s dedication to working out of doors was an integral component of her critical and commercial success. Her etchings were unequivocally praised for their on-the-spot execution: critic Morris T. Everett asserted that from “the long list of original etchings produced by Mrs. Moran, every one, without exception, was drawn on the plate direct from the subject,” while The New York Times declared that her work “has the merit of having in all instances been done directly from nature.” But what made etching in the open air so appealing and so valuable – not only to the artist, but also to critics and collectors of her work?

Adopted by Rembrandt and later “revived” by members of the Barbizon School, etching en plein air was an esteemed tradition and one that lent a degree of credibility to Nimmo Moran’s practice and prints. It also underscored the authenticity of her imagery, emphasizing her firsthand knowledge of nature, and it connected her practice to that of contemporary painters, who were increasingly working out of doors under the influence of the French Impressionists. Moreover, as Everett argued, etching en plein air distinguished her original prints from those of copyists and reproductive printmakers. He explained that the copyist “has only to follow, with as much precision as may be, the outlines and shadings of his master. Painting and etching direct from nature, on the other hand, throws the artist upon his own resources.” Everett continues:

Accuracy of draughtsmanship, quickness of eye, and a correct estimate of sky values, tones, and half-tones are necessary prerequisites of the painter or etcher who does work direct from nature, and the novice who essays efforts in this way courts a danger he would escape if he were under the guidance of a teacher...That Mrs. Moran should have begun [etching] as she did, a mere unskilled novice, and should have succeeded in producing such admirable effects is an enviable tribute to her genius.  

In reality, she was not an “unskilled novice” when she began etching in 1879, but had honed her plein-air skills for over a decade, drawing out of doors whenever possible in Philadelphia, Yosemite, Easton, and Newark. Trumble recognized the artist’s dedication to outdoor work, attributing her success as a painter-etcher “entirely to her devoted study of nature. Her fidelity to her eternal model is inviolate. Her research into its beauties is profound. In every line she traces upon the copper, her subtle sympathy with nature is revealed.”

Nimmo Moran’s commitment to etching en plein air became an essential element of her artistic identity and she often inscribed impressions with the phrase “From Nature.” It was also an important means by which she could distinguish her etchings from those of Thomas Moran, to whom she was most frequently compared. Critics often described her etchings as derivative or imitative of her husband’s work. Even Koehler, who was a strong supporter and collector of Nimmo Moran’s prints, noted that, “her husband’s influence is plainly visible in all that she does.” Yet a careful examination of their works and working practices reveals important distinctions between the two artists.

Throughout his career, Moran executed thousands of pencil studies from nature, which served as the “raw materials” for the landscape paintings he later composed in the studio. He approached etching in the same manner, drawing out of doors in pencil on paper before returning

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110 Everett, 9-11.  
112 Nimmo Moran typically inscribed impressions “From Nature” in graphite along the bottom edge of the paper. Examples include Three Mile Harbor (1880, National Museum of American History, 14576.1-14576.3); A Goose Pond, Easthampton (1881, National Museum of American History, 14566); and An Old Homestead, Easthampton (1880, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, K1484). The latter work was a gift from the artist to Sylvester Rosa Koehler.  
to the studio to formulate the final image on grounded copper. An 1886 photograph (figure 5.41) captures Moran at work on a copper plate in the couple’s New York studio – an image that contrasts with Ruth Moran’s description of her mother at work in “her favorite studio…beneath the spreading boughs of some hospitable tree.” Their distinct approaches to etching – Moran working from studies in the studio, Nimmo Moran working directly from nature – accounts for many of the stylistic differences in their works, as they often depicted the same subjects and sites with varying results.

In the summer 1880, both artists etched views of East Hampton’s Three Mile Harbor, located approximately four miles north of the village’s Main Street. In *Three Mile Harbor, L.I.* (1880, figure 5.11), Nimmo Moran adopted a worm’s-eye view, depicting the scene from below. Foreground rocks and irregular trees loom large over the viewer, whose focus is drawn to the natural terrain rather than the harbor. The etching’s title ostensibly identifies Three Mile Harbor as the print’s subject, yet Nimmo Moran included only a small inlet of water covering a fraction of the plate on the right side. In contrast, Moran evenly divided the middle ground of his *Three-Mile Harbor* (1880, figure 5.42) between earth and water. He drew the landscape from an elevated perspective and provides a clear view to the horizon, resulting in an expansive image of the harbor and its surrounding environs.

A similar comparison can be made when examining Moran’s *Sassafras Trees* (1880, figure 5.43) alongside Nimmo Moran’s *A Sassafras Grove, Easthampton, L.I.* (1883, figure 5.44). The two prints depict the same grove, yet Moran arranged his composition horizontally presenting a wide-angle view that includes twenty trees and a body of water extending to the horizon. In contrast, Nimmo Moran arranged her composition vertically, positioning the viewer

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closer to the tree trunks, which obstruct our view to the horizon. She abruptly cropped the upper edge and left side of the composition, indicating that the landscape extends well beyond the plate mark. By removing the horizon line and placing the viewer in close proximity to natural forms, she created an intimate scene that conveys the experience of being in nature, rather than observing it from a distance. \footnote{Nimmo Moran made graphite additions to one impression of this plate, in which she connected the lines of the clouds to create small hills on the horizon. She also transformed the middle distance into a body of water by adding a small sailboat. She did not incorporate these changes into the plate, however, for she may have found that the additions complicated and confused an already densely etched image. This impression is currently in the collection of the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1426.94H).}

The Morans’ distinct approaches to nature can be traced back to their early sketches and watercolors, such as the works they produced in Yosemite Valley in 1872. As discussed in Chapter Two, Moran typically depicted the western landscape from an elevated perspective, which art historian Joni Kinsey argues can be read as “a ‘magisterial gaze’ or ‘prospect’ that invited a sense of ownership and conveyed the idea of the availability and potential of the land.” \footnote{Joni Kinsey, “Moran and the Art of Publishing,” in Anderson, 308.} He adopted this point of view when etching East Hampton’s landscape, depicting distant vistas and wide expanses of earth, sea, and sky, as seen in prints such as \textit{A Road Near the Sea – Easthampton} (1880), \textit{Looking Over the Sand Dunes – Easthampton} (1880), and \textit{Morning} (1886). \footnote{These etchings are reproduced in Morand and Friese, \textit{The Prints of Thomas Moran}, 92, 102, and 150.} He also focused on natural phenomena, etching dramatic rainbows and epic sunrises, as well as natural disasters. \footnote{See, for example, Thomas Moran’s \textit{The Rainbow} (1880) and \textit{Sunrise – The Pond, Easthampton, L.I.} (1883), reproduced in Ibid., 96 and 128.} He was especially interested in the sublimity of the Atlantic Ocean, executing several seascapes over the course of the 1880s: prints such as \textit{The Lighthouse} (1879), \textit{The Much Resounding Sea} (1886), and \textit{A Wreck – Montauk} (1886) depict the eternal struggle of man verses nature and reveal the lasting influence of Turner on the artist’s oeuvre. \footnote{These etchings are reproduced in Ibid., 86-7, 136, and 140-141.}

In contrast, Nimmo Moran favored the quieter side of nature, emphasizing the rustic
simplicity of East Hampton’s landscape. Instead of the turmoil of the Atlantic Ocean, she depicted still lakes and man-made ponds that pose no threat to the viewer – seen, for example, in The Goose Pond, Easthampton (figure 5.18) and Hook Pond, Easthampton (figure 5.34). Even when depicting the drama of twilight (figure 5.13) or an impending storm (figure 5.25), she maintained a picturesque calm that contrasts with the sublimity of her husband’s work. Ruth Moran later noted this important distinction, writing that her mother’s prints were “quite unlike Thomas Moran’s in style – less imaginative, less romantic, more simple.” This comment was not intended to slight Nimmo Moran, but instead alludes to her preference for the tonal landscape – one that was based on her careful and devoted study of nature’s ordinary forms, which she represented in a manner reminiscent of the Barbizon School.

The Morans were not immune to each other’s works and working practices, and their etchings reveal that a visual dialogue existed between the two artists. In prints such as The Montauk Hills, Long Island (1884, figure 5.45) and Southampton, Village and Pond with Cows (1888, figure 5.46), Nimmo Moran drew the landscape from an elevated point of view, accentuating the horizontality of each scene. She added dramatic cloud forms in the sky to further enhance the grandiosity of nature in a manner reminiscent of Moran’s work. While critics were quick to highlight Moran’s influence on Nimmo Moran, it is important to recognize that her intimate, plein-air landscapes had an equally profound impact on his etched views of the East End. In the early 1880s, Moran executed several small-scale etchings that feature quiet corners of East Hampton’s landscape. Prints such as An Apple Orchard – Easthampton, L.I. (1883, figure 5.47) and Study of Buttonwood and Apple Trees (1883, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma)

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speak to the influence of Nimmo Moran’s prints on his etching practice, since both plates were uncharacteristically executed *en plein air*.121

When exhibited at Klackner’s Gallery in 1889, *An Apple Orchard* was described in the accompanying catalogue as “A close study of the peculiarly distorted and picturesque forms of fruit trees warped by the sea winds.”122 The print depicts Mulford’s Orchard on Main Street – a subject that Nimmo Moran also etched in 1883 (figure 5.47). In a manner similar to his wife, Moran drew the scene from within the orchard, focusing on the rugged, irregular tree branches that loom large overhead and obstruct our view to the horizon. He incorporated rural motifs, such as haystacks, chickens, a dilapidated coop, a toppled wheelbarrow, and a wooden fence – details that the viewer uncovers as s/he carefully studies the print.

Moran also applied a sandpaper ground, made drypoint additions, and adopted the vignette effect, subtly fading the image as it approaches the edges of the plate. As outlined above, these were techniques that Nimmo Moran used when etching East Hampton’s landscape and her technical success may have inspired Moran to similarly explore the expressive potential of printmaking tools. Finally, he printed impressions of *An Apple Orchard* in warm, reddish-brown ink – a color he used infrequently, but one that Nimmo Moran often experimented with when printing plates such as *Bridge over the Bushkill, Easthampton Barrens*, and *Gardiner’s Bay, From Fresh Ponds, L.I.*

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121 Although art historian T. Victoria Hansen writes that Thomas Moran “never etched directly from nature,” both *An Apple Orchard – Easthampton, L.I.* and *Study of Buttonwood and Apple Trees* were executed *en plein air*. Klackner’s catalogue indicates that the former work was “etched directly from nature,” while the artist inscribed the phrase “Study from Nature” into the lower left corner of the latter plate. Moreover, in 1881, Sylvester Rosa Koehler published a brief article on Moran’s recent etchings, noting that “many of these plates were etched on Long Island, directly from nature, and the feeling of nature has been most admirably preserved in them.” Koehler and Moran corresponded frequently in the early 1880s, making the critic a reliable source on the artist’s works and working practices. T. Victoria Hansen, “Thomas Moran and Nineteenth-Century Printmaking,” in Morand and Friese, *The Prints of Thomas Moran*, 19; Klackner, 12; and Sylvester Rosa Koehler, “New Etchings by Thomas Moran,” *American Art Review* 2, no. 9 (July 1881): 104. For a reproduction of Moran’s *Study of Buttonwood and Apple Trees* (1883), see Morand and Friese, *The Prints of Thomas Moran*, 126.

122 Klackner, 12.
Moran’s *An Apple Orchard* was among his most popular prints of East Hampton. A critic writing in *The Nation* praised the etching as “honest in every sense of the word, and distinguishable mainly by its excellence and the masterly precision and accentuation of its leading lines…the drawing of the tree forms of which is equal to any commendation we could give it.”\(^{123}\) Moran exhibited the print along with *A Study of Buttonwood and Apple Trees* in the 1884 annual exhibition of the New York Etching Club. Nimmo Moran contributed five prints to this show, including *My Neighbor’s Home, Easthampton* (figure 5.48) and *A Sassafras Grove* (figure 5.43).\(^{124}\) When reviewing the exhibition, the same critic that praised Moran’s *An Apple Orchard* in *The Nation* described Nimmo Moran’s etchings as “remarkably like those of Mr. Moran, but the difference is at once perceived when one sees in the work of the lady long wandering lines which seem to have no particular relation to any form, but to have been put in from idleness. Any leading line which has not a definite meaning in relation to facts of nature or the composition of the subject, is evidence of weak draughtsmanship or want of purpose.”\(^{125}\)

The same “wandering lines” that this critic disparaged as idle and weak were praised by contemporary etching advocates as bold, vigorous, and spontaneous. Koehler, for instance, described her touch as “essentially that of the true etcher, – nervous, vigorous, and rapid, and bitten in with a thorough appreciation of the relations of the needle and acid, preferring robustness of line to extreme delicacy.”\(^{126}\) Van Rensselaer similarly described her etchings as “above all things, direct, emphatic, bold,” attributing these qualities to the artist’s preference for *plein-air* work: “She has always etched direct from nature, usually finishing her plates to the

\(^{124}\)She also displayed *A Stormy Evening, Easthampton* (figure 5.25), “’Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame” (figure 5.26), and *Summer, Easthampton* (figure 5.14). A small plate version of the latter work was illustrated in the exhibition catalogue. Cat. nos. 127-131 in *Catalogue of the New York Etching Club* (New York: The Etching Club, 1884), 13.
\(^{125}\)“Fine Arts. The Etching Club Exhibition,” *The Nation* (February 28, 1884): 199.
very last stroke in the presence of the chosen scene, and then completing them with bitings [sic] as few and vigorous as possible.”

Despite Van Rensselaer’s assertion that the artist finished her plates in the presence of nature, my research reveals that Nimmo Moran’s etching process was far more complex and she often made substantial alterations to her plates after returning to the studio. This was standard practice among contemporary artists: in *The Etcher’s Handbook*, Philip Gilbert Hamerton advised artists to “set down a thought whilst it is yet most fresh and most vivid…give one sitting direct from nature, and finish afterwards in the house to get the work better together, always in view of the impression you received from nature. In some respects this plan is better than going to nature several times, because if you see the subject on different days…there will likely come a sort of confusion over your mind.”

Although Nimmo Moran did not document the procedural details of her etching process, a careful examination of her prints reveals that she adopted a method similar to the one Hamerton describes. She began by recording her initial impressions of a scene *en plein air*. Early in her etching career (ca. 1879-1881), she often made preparatory studies directly from nature, sketching out the compositional framework in pencil on paper before committing a scene to copper. As noted in Chapter Four, she executed preliminary studies for *Bridge over the Bushkill, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.5) and *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.12), and she continued this practice when working in East Hampton in the summer 1880. I have located pencil studies for *Twilight, Easthampton* (figure 5.49) and *An Old Homestead, Easthampton, L.I.* (figures 5.50-5.51), which outline the general parameters of each image. She did not, however, transfer her studies directly to the plate, but instead used them as

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127 Van Rensselaer, 494-495.
compositional guides when redrawing scenes on copper, often making substantial alterations from the sketches to the etchings.

When comparing the preparatory studies for *An Old Homestead, Easthampton, L.I.* (figures 5.50-5.51) to the finished print (1880, figure 5.12), one can discern important differences: in the studies, Nimmo Moran summarily outlined the house, quickly rendered a few wooden shingles, and broadly shaded the foliage; yet in the final image, she carefully delineated architectural details and drew each leaf, branch, and tree with a degree of specificity that reveals her close study of the scene. The finished print also conveys the atmospheric and light conditions of the moment, as she drew wispy, highly idiosyncratic lines in the sky to capture the ephemeral effect of transparent clouds.

Despite the etching’s intricacy and level of detail, it does not appear labored or contrived, as she maintained a swift and spontaneous line characteristic of *plein-air* work. This is especially evident in the foreground sand of *An Old Homestead*, where the rapidly incised lines take on the appearance of hurried, illegible script. Moreover, in the sky near the upper edge of the plate is horizontal marking approximately one inch in length. This mark was most likely made by a plate grip, which the artist would have used to hold the copper plate upside down while smoking – a process in which the plate is blackened with soot from a smoking flame to create a visible contrast between the ground and the metal plate.\(^{129}\)

Plate grips often damaged the ground, allowing etching to occur; however, an artist could easily remove such “accidents” if desired. In this instance, Nimmo Moran chose to let the accident stand, highlighting her artistic process in the final image.\(^ {130}\)

While Nimmo Moran’s studies allow us to trace the compositional adjustments the artist

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\(^{129}\) Stephen Fredericks, email to the author, June 5, 2015.
\(^{130}\) I have located twelve impressions of *An Old Homestead* all of which contain this mark from a plate grip.
made from preliminary sketch to final plate, she seems to have abandoned this practice all
together, as there are no known preparatory sketches that correspond to etched impressions she
produced after 1881. As her confidence and ability as an etcher advanced, she eliminated the
intermediary pencil study, instead working out compositional details directly on the plate. After
recording her initial impressions of a scene *en plein air* – whether in pencil on paper or directly
on copper – she then returned to the studio to complete the plate, as Hamerton noted, “to get the
work better together, always in view of the impression you received from nature.”\(^{131}\) This was a
well-established practice among professional painter-etchers, including artists such as Whistler,
whose prints were often criticized for their sketch-like incompleteness.

Despite the seemingly “unfinished” quality of Whistler’s works, he often spent weeks,
months, and even years reworking his plates in order to effectively convey a sense of immediacy.
There are, for example, eighteen known states of Whistler’s *Doorway and Vine* (1879/1880), as
the artist made several compositional adjustments, burnishing out and redrawing areas of the
plate.\(^ {132}\) Nevertheless, the eighteenth state maintains the freshness of the first, which was drawn
directly before the motif. As Whistler’s work demonstrates, the appearance of immediacy is not
necessarily an indication of the time spent on a given plate, for a great amount of labor (both
mental and physical) often goes into creating a print that appears effortless and spontaneous.
Nineteenth-century critics such as Charles Baudelaire emphasized this point, explaining that
etching was “like all great art, very complex beneath its apparent simplicity, it requires
prolonged devotion to be brought to perfection.”\(^ {133}\)

\(^{131}\) Hamerton, 48.
\(^{132}\) For a review of all eighteen states of Whistler’s *Doorway and Vine*, see Margaret F. MacDonald et al., *James
McNeill Whistler: The Etchings, A Catalogue Raisonné* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2012), accessed online
June 6, 2015, [http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/search/display/index.php?catno=K196&q=eighteen+known+
states&xml=sta](http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/search/display/index.php?catno=K196&q=eighteen+known+
states&xml=sta).
\(^{133}\) Charles Baudelaire, “Peintres et aquafortistes,” in *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard,
1976) quoted in Anna Siguríður Arnar, “Seduced by the Etcher’s Needle: French Writers and the Graphic Arts in
Nimmo Moran did not rework her plates as extensively as Whistler, yet she frequently made modifications and alterations to her images upon returning to the studio. I have documented multiple known states for several of her plates, including *Summer, Easthampton* (1883, figures 5.52-5.54), *Old Lindens, Near Easthampton* (1885, figures 5.55-5.56), and *Round Pond, Bridgehampton, L.I.* (1884, figures 5.57-5.59). After printing a trial proof, which she either pulled from the press in her studio or had printed by a professional firm such as Kimmel & Voigt, she would then return to the matrix to make necessary changes.\(^{134}\) Contemporary correspondence confirms this practice: in 1883, Moran wrote to Koehler on behalf of his wife, explaining that he had sent examples of her plates to Kimmel & Voigt “asking them to again prove the plates & to immediately return me proofs… since the first proof we have added much work upon them.”\(^{135}\) The following year, Moran wrote again to Koehler noting that “Mrs. M[oran] has fixed her plate and returns to K[immel] & V[oigt] tomorrow.”\(^{136}\)

We can trace Nimmo Moran’s “fixes” or compositional alterations with extant impressions taken from different states of her plates. There are, for example, three known states of *Summer, Easthampton*: in the first state, the artist drew Goose Pond (now known as Town Pond) and Hook Mill as seen through a natural frame of trees and foliage (figure 5.52). In the middle ground, she included a pathway with three cows and a figure on horseback. However, after printing a trial proof, she may have found the image to be too crowded and compact. On the back of the proof, she traced in graphite the outline of the innermost trees and re-sketched the

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\(^{134}\) Even though the Morans had an etching press in their home-studio, they often worked with professional printing firms such as Kimmel & Voigt, especially when producing impressions for publication in exhibition and auction catalogues. These works are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.


central scene of the pond and mill, removing the figure and the cows. She incorporated these
changes into the second state of the plate (figure 5.53), burnishing out the middle ground and
redrawing the pond and mill, enlarging the former and reducing the latter. After pulling a proof
from the second state of the plate, she continued to make adjustments, adding graphite and chalk
annotations directly to the proof. She incorporated these changes into the third and final state of
the plate (figure 5.54), resulting in a far more open, balanced, and proportional image.\textsuperscript{137}

When \textit{Summer, Easthampton} was exhibited at Klackner’s Gallery in 1889, the
accompanying catalogue described the print as “A very vigorous study from nature. One of the
etcher’s plates most esteemed among artists and connoisseurs as being completely expressive of
her ability.”\textsuperscript{138} As the trial proofs and early states of the plate indicate, her “study from nature”
was a work in progress, requiring modification and refinement before the artist arrived at the
final or “finished” image. Throughout her career, she adapted and reworked her plates when
necessary, often sketching out changes on proofs prior to committing them to copper.

Trial proofs of \textit{Old Lindens, Near Easthampton} (figure 5.55) and \textit{Round Pond,
Bridgehampton, L.I.} (figure 5.57) contain substantial graphite and chalk additions made by the
artist as she fine-tuned compositional details and enhanced atmospheric effects. In \textit{Old Lindens},
she added a large tree branch to the scene, creating a natural archway over the landscape; in
\textit{Round Pond}, she added a small hunter in a boat and substantially reworked the sky to produce an
effect that Klackner described as “moonlight.”\textsuperscript{139} Two impressions of \textit{Round Pond} reveal the
results of her atmospheric alterations: a clean wipe impression (figure 5.58) illustrates the
dramatic linear additions the artist made to the sky, while an artistically printed impression with

\textsuperscript{137} In the final state, she also removed the date “1883” from her plate signature.
\textsuperscript{138} Klackner, 20.
\textsuperscript{139} Klackner’s entry on this etching reads in full: “In this plate the touch of the etcher is seen at her best. In the
foreground, middle distance, and sky her command of the forms and suggestions of nature is completely shown. The
plate is intended to be completed as a moonlight, and only six proofs will be sold in this State.” See Ibid.
plate tone (figure 5.59) subtly captures the luminosity of moonlight through the clouds.

Despite the free and spontaneous character of her line, the artist engaged in thorough compositional alterations and technical manipulations in order to develop her imagery and push the boundaries of the medium. In fact, many of the inventive techniques that earned the artist acclaim, including her use of the roulette, sandpaper, and drypoint, were often added to the matrix in the second or third state. For example, there are three known states of *A Stormy Evening, East Hampton* (figures 5.60-5.62): a clean wipe trial proof of the first state (figure 5.60) reveals the markings she made with the etching needle *en plein air*. After printing a trial proof, she returned to the matrix and added extensive roulette work – first to the sky, distant windmill, and houses on the horizon, as seen in the second state of the plate (figure 5.61), and then to the left of the foreground windmill, creating a shadow in the third and final state of the plate (figure 5.62). When printing impressions of the final state, she enveloped the fore- and middle ground of the composition in plate tone, further enhancing the soft tonality and atmospheric drama of the scene. Critics praised images such as *A Stormy Evening, Easthampton* for their bold, painterly, and vigorous qualities – qualities that the artist created by reworking her plates over time.

It is necessary to emphasize the mental and physical labor that Nimmo Moran put into producing a given plate, for it was precisely this labor that differentiated her professional practice from that of the amateur. Throughout the nineteenth century, etching “revival” advocates drew clear distinctions between the practices of amateurs and professional painter-etchers. Amateurs, who were generally assumed to be women, were said to produce etchings hurriedly and thoughtlessly. They were, as Baudelaire described them, the “fair ‘ladies’ [who] prided themselves on their ability to run an inexperienced needle over the varnished plate.”

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contrast, professionals, who were generally assumed to be men, created plates through great mental and physical labor. Art historian Anna Arnar explains:

Writers as ideologically diverse as Baudelaire, Champfleury, and the Goncourt brothers described this process [etching] as necessarily difficult and even violent, for this image captured what they viewed as the intense physicality of modern artistic production. Whereas the eighteenth-century amateur tradition of etching was stereotypically regarded as spontaneous and accessible, modern etchings were frequently described as products of great physical strain and struggle, despite their appearance of spontaneity and ease.\(^{141}\)

Although seemingly spontaneous, Nimmo Moran’s etchings are complex, labor-intensive compositions, inspired by plein-air study but formally reworked and technically refined to convey her personal impressions of nature.

Nimmo Moran’s technical manipulations and nostalgic approach to nature also tie her landscape etchings to the works of Tonalist painters and Pictorialist photographers. Artists such as George Inness and John Twatchman believed it was the artist’s primary purpose to interpret rather than transcribe nature. Corn writes that both men were “fundamentally anti-realist and anti-scientific,” yet this attitude “did not preclude a careful study of nature’s forms…Inness and Twatchman insisted that the beginning artist thoroughly understand the underlying structures and systems of nature…Having achieved this mechanical skill, the artist was ostensibly ready to edit and interpret what he saw and experienced. His skill in rendering the facts of nature had to be subjected to his own peculiar temperament or creative talents.”\(^{142}\) Corn notes that Tonalists combined realism and individual interpretation to create what was then known as a “synthetic” style – the antithesis of the Hudson River’s School’s so-called “analytical” style.

Gerdts has similarly argued that the Tonalist process fell “somewhere between traditionalists and impressionists,” since they often sketched and painted out of doors before

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\(^{141}\) Arnar, *The Book As Instrument*, 78.

\(^{142}\) Corn, 5.
returning to the studio where “nature was to be reacted to and improved upon.” Inness himself asserted that a painting must possess “both the subjective sentiment – the poetry of nature – and the objective fact.” His approach was informed by the work of his Barbizon predecessors, the “Men of 1830,” who critic Charles Caffin noted, “selected from the scene itself its salient features, eliminating the unessentials and compressing the whole into a vivid synthesis. And the latter included not merely the external appearance, but the inward spirit of the scene. Through communing with nature, these men acquired so strong a sympathy with their subject that the mood of their own spirit became reflected in nature; their works interpreted their own souls in terms of nature; they were nature-poets.”

It is precisely this combination of fact and fiction, observation and imagination, poetry and reality that defines Mary Nimmo Moran’s etched oeuvre. Her “synthetic” – what is now known as Tonalist – approach to the American landscape is most pronounced in her etchings of East Hampton, for these works were based on her extensive knowledge and study of nature en plein air, yet present her subjective impressions of a scene. In order to successfully convey and interpret her experiences in nature, she focused on small, intimate scenes and adopted a personal, inventive approach to etching, utilizing an array of printmaking tools and techniques that enhanced the tonal and emotional import of her work.

Although Corn defined Tonalism as a style, rather than a school, the research of art historians William Gerdts and Jack Becker has revealed that there was in fact a distinct Tonalist movement that emerged in the United States in the 1890s. Gerdts identified artist Henry Ward Ranger as the leader of this movement, which he argues was recognized by contemporary artists,

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critics, and collectors as a unified school of landscape painting. Becker has similarly documented the movement’s rise in the 1890s, which he demonstrates was encouraged by the exhibition program of New York’s Lotos Club, the collecting agenda of William T. Evans, the critical writings of John Charles Van Dyke, and the art of Ranger. By 1906, Ranger and his contemporaries, including artists Bruce Crane, John Francis Murphy, Ralph Albert Blakelock, and Birge Harrison composed what art critic Clara Ruge declared was “a national school of landscape painting which is rapidly advancing in importance and originality. It is not the first well-defined school in this country. The Hudson River school was distinct and characteristic. But the Tonal School is the first one, I believe, which is destined to leave a mark in the history of art.” As a result, both Inness and Whistler (who Corn identified as the two major practitioners of American Tonalism) have been repositioned in the scholarship as the forefathers of the Tonalist movement, since neither artist affiliated with the school nor used the term “Tonalism” to describe their work.

Avery has argued that the Tonalists proper – the generation of artists who painted and exhibited in the late 1890s and early 1900s – looked “to both men for guidance, even in a single picture. For all the differences between Inness and Whistler in the density and application of medium, the moody, ghostly effect of the resulting images bespeaks – at least at times –

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149 David Adams Cleveland divides the artists associated with the Tonalist style into three generations: the first or “founding generation (godfathers of the Tonalist movement),” who were born before 1840; the second or “prime (core) generation,” who were born between 1840 and 1865; and the third or “transitional generation,” who were born after 1865. Cleveland identifies Inness and Whistler – along with William Morris Hunt, Alexander Wyant, Homer Dodge Martin, George Fuller, and John La Farge – as members of the first generation, whose works laid the foundation for the rise of the Tonal School. Cleveland, 571-572.
convergent sensibilities.” While the influence of Inness and Whistler upon the development of Tonalist painting is undeniable, the role of American printmaking – and notably the role of the American painter-etcher movement – has been overlooked in much of the literature.

Gerdts identified the 1880s as Tonalism’s seminal decade, during which time “all of these [artists], after all, were finding their way. By the following decade they were working within a Tonalist aesthetic.” The 1880s also corresponds to the height of the painter-etcher movement in the United States, when artists such as Mary Nimmo Moran were executing painterly prints that depict America’s rural landscape in muted colors and harmonious tones. Yet Nimmo Moran and her contemporaries were not associated with the Tonal School, nor did they use the term “Tonalism” to describe their prints. In fact, the etching “revival,” which rose to prominence in the United States after the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, was declared “over” in 1893 – three years before the first official exhibition of Tonal painting was held at the Lotos Club in New York.

As a result, painter-etchers such as Nimmo Moran, who depicted intimate views of the American landscape in soft light and expressive tones to convey personal emotions and poetic moods, from repose and solitude to nostalgia and longing, should be viewed – along with Inness and Whistler – as the forbearers of the Tonal School. Her emphasis on autographic expression combined with etching’s inherent multiplicity and, when compared to oil painting, relatively inexpensive price tag greatly contributed to the widespread popularity of the Tonalist aesthetic with American artists, critics, and collectors.

When examining Nimmo Moran’s original etchings of the 1880s, and notably the works she executed in East Hampton, it is evident that she shared many of the same formal and

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150 Avery, 12.
thematic concerns as contemporary Tonalist painters. Moreover, as a graphic artist working in a monochromatic medium, her influence upon the development of Pictorial photography – from a thematic and technical standpoint – must be acknowledged. Art historian Martin Hopkinson has noted that “some Pictorialist photographers paid a conscious homage to etchers, particularly Whistler, in their choice of compositions” and he cites works by both Clarence White and Alvin Langdon Coburn as having “echoes of specific prints by Whistler.” More recently, Eric Denker and Emilie K. Johnson examined the compositional influence of Whistler’s Venetian etchings upon Alfred Stieglitz’s Venetian photographs. Yet Whistler did not depict the American landscape, which art historian Diane Fischer has argued was a defining characteristic of American Pictorialism.

Artists such as Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Joseph Keiley, and Rudolf Eickemeyer, Jr. photographed America’s urban and rural landscape in order to convey their national identity and distinguish their works from those of their European contemporaries. In this regard, their approach resembles that of painter-etchers working in the United States in the 1880s, many of whom depicted the American landscape in order to redefine etching as an American medium. Art historian Rona Schneider writes that, “there was the acceptance of the idea that etching could become an American art by depicting the American landscape…that the technique and style of etching were rooted in French and English practices was not disturbing, just so long as the method was applied to the American landscape.” By 1910, art dealer Frederick Keppel could

156 Ibid.
confidently assert that, “The genius of our national character and the genius of our painter-
etching have this in common – that both are practical, rapid, and direct, disliking and avoiding all
that is tedious and superfluous, and desiring above all to arrive at the essential core of things.”

Moreover, Nimmo Moran depicted the American landscape in a single ink color –
typically black or brown – mastering the art of monochromatic expression. By limiting her
personal visions of nature to a single hue, she pushed the Tonalist aesthetic to its extreme. Caffin
would later argue for photography’s superiority as a Tonalist medium on a similar basis, writing:
“Photographers have more completely realized the beauty of tone; and this from the nature of
their craft. For, whether they print their pictures in gray, black, brown or some other tint, they are
practically limited to one color and must obtain variety and harmony by playing upon subtle
gradations from the darkest to the lightest parts.”

Between 1890 and 1910, American photographers, including Stieglitz, Steichen, White,
Coburn, and Gertrude Käsebier extensively manipulated the photographic medium to create tonal
effects in monochrome: they altered their lenses and adopted filters to exaggerate soft-focus;
experimented with different developing and printing processes in the darkroom; and utilized a
variety of papers and pigments. It has been established that these technical manipulations
mimic the soft, atmospheric effects achieved by painters working in oil and watercolor. Yet these
manipulations also evoke the tonal prints produced by painter-etchers of the 1880s – artists such
as Nimmo Moran who successfully employed printmaking tools and techniques to create
harmonious tones in black and white.

159 Charles Caffin, Photography as Fine Art: The Achievements and Possibilities of Photographic Art in America
160 On Pictorialist photographic techniques, see Corn, The Color of Mood, 13-19; Fischer, “Pictorialism as
Steichen, for example, would shake his camera or drop water on the lens to blur an image, while other photographers altered their lenses or shot through gauze filters to create hazy, atmospheric effects. Exaggerated soft-focus was often used to convey the “fuzziness” of a landscape, which photographers “found exciting, not only for its ‘natural’ effects but also as a means of poeticizing their expression.”\(^\text{161}\) The platinum print and the gum print were especially popular processes with Pictorialists, for although both required manual skill and printing expertise, they afforded the photographer greater control over tonal gradations. We can compare these techniques to Nimmo Moran’s use of plate tone, the roulette, \textit{retroussage}, and drypoint, which enabled her to blur and soften her etched lines, creating expansive areas of color and subtle gradations of tone.

Nimmo Moran also went to great lengths to emphasize the unique, handmade quality of each impression, altering the inking, wiping, and printing of a plate from one impression to the next. In a similar manner, Pictorialists manipulated their photographic prints to underscore the hand of the artist in the production of the image. Käsebier, for example, drew a charcoal frame around \textit{The Bat} (1904, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), while Steichen applied emulsion in visible brushstrokes to his \textit{Untitled (Experiment in Gum)} (1904, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), which he printed on three separate occasions in different shades of black ink.\(^\text{162}\) Coburn was also known for printing in different colored pigments. He described his approach to making a two-toned platinum print, writing: “The finished print was then coated with a thin layer of gum-biochromate containing pigment of the desired color. I found Vandyke brown especially suitable owing to its transparency, and by having the underlying platinum print

\(^{161}\) Corn, 14.
\(^{162}\) Diane P. Fischer, “Pictorialism as Tonalism,” 32-33.
in grey, a very pleasant two color.” Nimmo Moran had also experimented with Vandyke brown when printing impressions of her *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (1879, figure 4.16), taking advantage of the fluidity of the pigment to create a translucent wash.

Although the techniques and processes that painter-etchers and Pictorial photographers adopted were specific to the medium in question, the final results were remarkably similar, as they shared a desire to create expressive and original works of art. There is no evidence that photographers were looking directly to the prints of Nimmo Moran for inspiration, yet her willingness to experiment with printmaking tools and techniques combined with her nostalgic approach to the American landscape is echoed in the photographs of American Pictorialists. She pushed the conventional boundaries of etching to create painterly prints that capture her personal impressions of nature. The following decade, photographers would similarly manipulate the tools of their trade to produce evocative images aimed at rivaling the tonal qualities found in both paintings and etchings of the era.

Although rarely discussed in the literature today, the link between etching and photography was noted by critics of the early twentieth century. Caffin, who ardently argued for photography’s status as a fine art, noted that “no stress need be laid” on photography’s monochromatic palette, “for, in its present inability to reproduce color, photography stands along side of etching; nor must we forget that a good ‘black-and-white,’ though it does not state the colors of a scene, has a power of suggesting them.” In his 1901 publication *Photography as Fine Art*, Caffin argued that the photographer’s aim is to “make it [the camera] record his impressions of the fact, and to express in the print his personal feeling.” This could be achieved through the manipulation of a negative and/or print. In Frank Eugene’s *The Horse* (ca. 1900, Art

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163 Alvin Langdon Coburn quoted in Corn, 16.
Institute of Chicago) – a platinum print in which Eugene scratched the surface of the negative with what he described as a “retouching knife” – the artist created a work that Caffin argued had about it “the quality of texture and spontaneity of a fine etching.”

Caffin noted that the similarities between the two media “have a bearing on the question sometimes asked of the photographer: If you desire the effect of an etching, of a chalk or wash-drawing, why not etch or draw with chalk or water-color; why use the camera and confuse the processes?” To this, Caffin responded:

Well, to myself, that print [Eugene’s The Horse], printed as it is on Japan paper, conveys every impression of an etching, having the beautiful characteristics that one looks for therein: spontaneity of execution, vigorous and pregnant suggestiveness, velvety color, and delightful evidence of the personal touch. There is nothing sacred or even desirable in the mere process of etching upon copper apart from its results. If similar results can be obtained some other way, and the artist chooses to adopt it because he finds it easier or more congenial, what concern is it of ours? Surely none.

The characteristics of etching that Caffin highlights – spontaneity, suggestiveness, color, and personal touch – were hallmarks of the “revival” and when manipulating negatives and prints to achieve these effects, photographers were following the example set by American painter-etchers of the 1880s.

Audiences in the early twentieth century also made the connection between etching and photography, often mistaking the latter for the former. In 1908, critic J. Nilsen Laurvic curated an exhibition of contemporary paintings, sculptures, etchings, and photographs at the National Arts Club in New York. The show included paintings by Ashcan artists Robert Henri, George Luks, and William Glackens, as well as works by those who paint “according to Whistlerian standards…men [who] have something to say, and they say it in their own way,” including Leon

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165 Caffin, Photography as Fine Art, 95 and 106.
166 Ibid., 108-110.
167 National Arts Club, Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art, January 4-January 25, 1908 (New York: National Arts Club, 1908).
Dabo, Twatchman, and Steichen. Most notable was the inclusion of Pictorialist photographs alongside the other media on display. A critic in *The New York Times* highlighted the novelty of this curatorial approach, writing: “A feature of the exhibition is the showing of photographs by the members of the Photo-Secession on the same plane as paintings, which has never before been done in this country. That they are deserving of this recognition is amply proved by the manner in which these prints hold their own with the paintings and etchings shown.”

Corn cites this review as proof that painting and photography had much in common during this period, noting that, “the two arts have often striven for similar expression and have held identical esthetic considerations. Never was this more evident than in the 1890’s and 1900’s.” Yet it is essential that we add etching to this discussion, for as *The Times* critic noted, visitors compared the photographs on display not only to paintings, but also to etched impressions. In an article on the exhibition published in *Camera Work*, Laurvik noted that many visitors had in fact mistaken the photographs as prints:

> For the first time in America, pictorial photography was on a level with paintings and etchings. That they held their own and ‘made good,’ so to speak, was amply proven by the unusual interest these prints aroused, despite the fact that many mistook them for mezzotints at first glance, only to discover to their amazement and mortification that these were merely photographs they had had been admiring…Coburn’s print, called “The [White] Bridge – Venice,” was mistaken for an etching and a mezzotint.

This case of mistaken medium reveals the close ties between printmaking and photography during this period.

Among the painter-etchers working in the United States in the 1880s, Mary Nimmo Moran was recognized as a leading innovator and influential interpreter of the American

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169 Ibid.
170 Corn, 13.
171 Dedicated to contemporary art, this exhibition featured etchings by living artists, including Mary Cassatt, Joseph Pennell, and John Sloan. For a complete list of the etchings and photographs on display, see cat. nos. 101-159 in National Arts Club, *Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, n.p.
landscape. Her expressively etched, nostalgic landscapes veiled in soft light and atmospheric tones reveal that she engaged with many of the same perceptual and conceptual concerns as Tonalist painters and Pictorialist photographers. Moreover, her distinct approach to etching, which included experiments with plate tone, *retoussage*, Scotch stone, the roulette, sandpaper, and drypoint, earned her critical acclaim, and the popularity of her work with an urban clientele contributed to the development and success of the Tonalist aesthetic at the end of the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER 6: RECEPTION, EXHIBITION, AND PUBLICATION HISTORY

Critical Reception

In March 1889, art critic Alfred Trumble declared that the “signature ‘M.N.M.’ to a proof is one of those which the connoisseur and the collector of etchings esteems among the most precious that can be secured for the enrichment of his portfolios.”¹ Ten years after setting down “some wriggles” on the back of her calling card plate, Mary Nimmo Moran was among the most successful American painter-etchers. Her original prints were promoted by reputable critics, featured in historic exhibitions, published in limited-edition portfolios, sold by prominent dealers, and acquired by noteworthy collectors. Throughout the 1880s, she maintained her membership in London’s Society of Painter-Etchers and the New York Etching Club, where according to critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, “no name stands higher on its role.”²

Her etchings nostalgically preserve America’s rural, pre-industrial landscape and primarily attracted an urban clientele: her works were displayed and sold in cities – from New York and Boston to Philadelphia, Chicago, London, and Vienna – and appealed to metropolitan sensibilities. Her combination of technical innovation and nostalgic evocation met the market’s growing demand for original yet affordable works of art that provided visual respite for those seeking to escape the complexities of modern-industrial life. Furthermore, art historian Kevin Avery has argued that, “Tonalism accommodated Americans’ post-Civil War taste for an art not only of Continental sophistication but also of rarified sentiment or emotion.”³ Etching’s

European pedigree combined with the international character of the painter-etcher movement appealed to the cosmopolitan ambitions of American collectors in the Gilded Age. When used to nostalgically preserve the American landscape, as seen in the work of Nimmo Moran, etching could successfully fulfill the demand for an art that was sophisticated, modern, and “Continental” and simultaneously personal, emotional, and American.

Art historian Jack Becker has outlined three principal qualities of Tonalist art that appealed to American collectors: its stylistic association with the Barbizon school; its potential to rival the commercial value of Barbizon and Barbizon-inspired art; and its perceived ability to have a soothing, therapeutic effect on the viewer. Critics promoted the positive effects of the tonal landscape: Charles de Kay asserted that one “could not fail to discover that there is more balm in the Gilead for a hard-pressed, weary business man in the subtle tone sonnets and lovely color reveries of the landscapists,” while John Charles Van Dyke advised collectors to “choose the quieter, more subdued pieces – those that do not rack us like a cataract, but rather soothe us with the gentle murmur of the woodland brook. They will grow and improve with acquaintanceship, and in them we shall find the true poetry of the commonplace, the most satisfactory and sympathetic of all.”

The desire or need to seek out soothing, gentle imagery was a response to the turbulent societal changes of the era. Art historian Sarah Burns has demonstrated that urbanites turned to art – notably landscape painting – as a therapeutic “rest cure” at the end of the nineteenth century: “In a world made complex and bewildering by rapid modernization, pleasure was a needed counterbalance and antidote to severe new pressures. At the same time, it became a vital

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component in the social and cultural economy of emergent consumer culture. The kind of pleasure that art produced defined itself in direct relation to the new American disease of neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion.”

Burns writes that, “no organ suffered greater debilities than the eyes,” which required rest and relaxation – a proverbial “vacation from the labors that forced them to exceed their capacities.”

Simple, quiet landscapes painted or printed in muted tones offered the eyes the relaxation that was prescribed. Burns writes that the most effective scenes were those in which “nothing happened” since the “lack of incidence and inflection enhanced the pleasurable action of pure color, light, and atmosphere on the senses.” Color played a preeminent role “because it conveyed an immediate sensation to the retina, optic nerve, and perceiving mind of the viewing subject...The dominant discourse on color tended to privilege complex, muted tones, over simpler, brighter hues, since they were held to be supremely soothing.” Burns concludes that within this discourse, painting’s objective – and to this I would add painter-etching’s objective – was to “minister to the senses, inducing delicious relaxation.” Art was redefined as a “balm for weary eyes and tonic to soothe or stimulate weary minds” and, as a result, “the rhetoric of therapy permeated the language of critical response to painting.”

An examination of Nimmo Moran’s reception history reveals that the “rhetoric of therapy” similarly permeated responses to her landscape etchings. Printed in monochrome, typically warm shades of brown or black ink on off-white, ivory, or cream-colored paper, her etchings were praised for their simple and uneventful subject matter. Critic Morris T. Everett highlighted her preference for “unpretentious scenes whose beauty she discovered and recorded.

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7 Ibid., 139 and 141.
8 Ibid., 141, 142, 139, and 145.
Many of them are nooks in the vicinity of her Easthampton home...a hillside, a pool, a clump of trees, a tumble-down ramshackle, a stretch of marsh-land, or something equally simple, and equally devoid of interest save when seen by an artist who had poetry enough in her soul to make such scenes replete with meaning and beauty.”

These “unpretentious” scenes were capable of providing urban audiences with the relaxation and repose they desperately sought to calm their nerves and rest their eyes.

*Twilight, Easthampton* (figure 5.13), for example, was said to have “peculiar soft effects...The gray night is succeeding the glow with which the setting sun has glorified the landscape, a hush pervades all nature, and the dark masses of the trees are outlined dimly against the fading sky. All is rest, peace and sublimity.”

“*‘Twee the Gloamin’ and the Mirk...”* (figure 5.26) was similarly described as “an idyllic pastoral...the slow, meandering pace of the kine wending their peaceful way homeward in the twilight is so soothing and tranquil and ‘the hush of the eventide broods over the dying day.’ This is the most tender and ideal of the sweet artist’s conceptions.”

Burns notes that the adjective “soothing” was especially popular in the therapeutic lexicon, for it conveyed an artwork’s ability to replicate the positive effects of immersing oneself in nature. Nimmo Moran’s etchings appealed to urbanites for many of the same reasons that “tired New Yorkers” left the city in the summer months: they sought peace and quiet, rest and repose from their chaotic lives in the modern metropolis.

As late as the 1950s, critics continued to respond favorably to the nostalgic evocations of her prints. When reviewing the memorial exhibition of her etchings organized by Jacob Kainen at the U.S. National Museum in 1950, a critic in *The Sunday Star* remarked that, “those who actually remember that decade [the 1880s] or the one which followed feel nostalgic for a

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10 “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
11 Ibid.
comparatively hopeful, uncomplicated time…when I visited this charming show it reminded me persistently of summer vacations in the county, on the seacoast or in unhurried cities, when the only cloud on the horizon was the certainty of school reopening in September. The show really suggests some people’s mental concepts of the world of 1870-1914.”

While Nimmo Moran’s landscape imagery was described in the press as placid, idyllic, soothing, and tender, etching advocates characterized her printmaking techniques as bold, strong, and virile. Sylvester Rosa Koehler described her touch as “essentially that of a true etcher – nervous, vigorous, and rapid…preferring robustness of line to extreme delicacy.” Although these descriptions appear contradictory, critics typically differentiated between the artist’s imagery and technique – celebrating the former for its peace and tranquility and the latter for its boldness and virility. Burns has assessed the inconsistency of such critiques explaining that,

Nervous sensitivity was at once the disease and the proud badge of individual and cultural evolution. Its flip side was the sizzling American nervous energy responsible for firing up the engine of progress in the first place. For every complaint about nervous exhaustion there was a boast about American nervous force…nervousness, the master trait of the modern American, shone forth everywhere.

Critics saw it in the paintings of artists such as William Merritt Chase and James McNeill Whistler, yet whether either man was “really nervous…is less important than the fact that such representations reveal their interpreters’ preoccupations with questions of nationality, progress, and the ‘advanced’ body and its maintenance.” However, in the work of women artists, “nervousness” often implied an entirely different meaning.

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14 Burns, 136-137.
15 Ibid., 137.
In the case of Nimmo Moran, the nervousness that critics identified in her etched lines underscored her modernity and status as a professional. As discussed in Chapter Three, art criticism played a crucial role in redefining etching’s aesthetic and commercial potential at the end of the nineteenth century. Advocates on both sides of the Atlantic, including Koehler, Charles Baudelaire, and Philip Gilbert Hamerton asserted that “true” etching was strong, forceful, and frank. The medium was the province of highly skilled individuals, whose originality, virility, and masculinity were captured in the incised lines of the copper plate.\(^\text{16}\) Art historian Martha Tedeschi has argued that this coded, gendered rhetoric was strategically adopted to disassociate modern painter-etchers, who were decidedly professional and invariably male, from past practitioners, namely female amateurs of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, the alignment of original etching with professionalism and masculinity was challenged when the artist in question was a woman.

In order to deal with this conundrum, critics reviewing Nimmo Moran’s etchings typically erased her gender, arguing that the strength and boldness of her prints belied her femininity. Van Rensselaer asserted that her work would “never reveal her sex – according that is, to the popular idea of feminine characteristics. It is, above all things, direct, emphatic, bold, – exceeding in these qualities, perhaps, that of any of her male co-workers.”\(^\text{17}\) Everett later echoed Van Rensselaer’s assessment, writing:

> Her etching had an originality about it that gave evidence of a genius for that class of art production. It had a virile strength that set it in a class by itself. Her plates, as has frequently been said, would never reveal her sex, since they disproved the popular idea that the productions of a woman naturally betray feminine characteristics. Her work was


\(^{17}\) Van Rensselaer, “American Etchers,” 494.
direct, emphatic and bold to a point even that would not be attempted by male workers in
the same line of art. Her own innate force of character, her broad, skillful treatment of her
subjects, and her wise avoidance of affectation and incongruities resulted in the
production of plates that have about them no suggestion of a woman’s hand. When critics compared her etchings to those of her contemporaries – and notably to the
works of Thomas Moran – her prints were often said to be more “manly.” Van Rensselaer
described Solitude (figure 5.9) as a “solid” and “preeminently manly piece of work,” yet felt that
Moran’s best prints expressed qualities of “delicacy and refinement and grace, rather than those of force.” The Critic also found her work to be “bolder, broader and more often displays
sympathy with the ordinary aspects of nature [than Moran’s],” while The New York Times
categorized her etchings as “more ‘virile’ than his.” Art critic Elisabeth Luther Cary later
wrote that “from the boldness of the line and the frank and rugged style throughout I should think it must have been Mary Nimmo, the wife and pupil of Thomas, who surpassed her husband in all of the points which were usually counted masculine.” By emphasizing the strength and
masculinity of her work, critics were complimenting her success, establishing her status as a professional and ultimately underscoring their preference for her etchings, which they felt were manlier – i.e. superior.

The response to Nimmo Moran’s etchings is indicative of the era’s critical discourse,
which was increasingly divided along gendered lines. Art historian Kirsten Swinth has
demonstrated that between 1870 and 1910 the language and tone of American art criticism
underwent a dramatic transformation. As women pursued professional careers in the arts in
unprecedented numbers, art critics and male artists were made increasingly uneasy by their

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18 Everett, 4.
presence and success. An anxiety soon emerged and many felt that women were “winning the race.” As a result, Swinth argues that a new critical rhetoric developed, one in which the praise for academic skill and refined sentiment – hallmarks of earlier art criticism – was replaced by a gendered discourse, which “became more insistent, more absolute, and more explicitly aligned with sex”:

Rejecting refinement as too ‘feminine’ and technique as too mechanical, critics called for greater individuality and virility in American art. They praised art that seemed to display ‘masculine strength,’ which they defined in terms of a striking, individual vision and a ‘virile’ virtuoso style. However, only men could achieve such art: from women, critics now demanded the ‘essentially feminine,’ something fundamentally different and almost always lesser. This new aesthetic ideology shored up male artists’ confidence...²³

Swinth illustrates that this transformation in the critical reception of American painting began in the 1890s; however, when reviewing etching criticism from this era, it is evident that gendered language was pervasive in the 1880s, when it was used to differentiate the strong work of professional men from the delicate work of amateur women.

The critical responses to Nimmo Moran’s works reveal that her etchings remarkably escaped “feminization” and transcended the gendered divide. Contemporary women etchers were not always as lucky: Koehler, for example, highlighted the prints of both Eliza Greatorex and Anna Lea Merritt in *The American Art Review*, writing that “The work of Mrs. Greatorex is delicate rather than strong, in its inception as well as in its execution,” and praised Merritt’s etched portrait of Sir Gilbert Scott for its “marvellous [sic] combination of delicacy and strength in modelling [sic] of the head...yet the plate in its present state...falls measurably behind in delicacy when compared with the first state.”²⁴ Delicacy did not necessarily possess a negative

connotation, yet it was a gendered term and one that was believed to appropriately manifest itself in plates etched by a woman’s hand.

In contrast, Koehler wrote that Nimmo Moran preferred “robustness of line to extreme delicacy” – a characterization he immediately followed by the assertion that “the influence of her husband’s example is plainly visible in all that she does.”25 When critics “discovered” masculine qualities in women’s work, they often attributed it to a male influence: Guy Pène du Bois, for example, wrote that Lydia Field Emmett’s “direct and economical” use of her paint brush was a “lesson [that] has been learned, perhaps, from the men,” while Charles Caffin insisted that Cecelia Beaux’s “masculine breadth of technique…come[s] to us from a man like Sargent.”26 This was a strategic means by which critics could explain how and why these women artists were “trespassing on the terrain of men.”27 In Nimmo Moran’s case, critics may have attributed the “masculinity” of her plates to her husband’s influence; nevertheless, many felt that her etchings exceeded his in “all of the points which were usually counted masculine.”28

The critical consideration that Nimmo Moran’s work received was the exception, rather than the rule. Art historian Phyllis Peet has demonstrated that “so little attention was paid to women printmakers other than [Nimmo] Moran and Cassatt” and “most of the attention women did receive at least implied they were operating at a different level of professionalism (or that they were not professional at all), thus devaluing women’s art.”29 Yet Nimmo Moran’s reception history reveals that her critical success often depended upon the erasure of her gender from analyses of her work. The artist’s perceived ability to conceal her femininity and surpass

27 Ibid.
28 Cary, 5.
colleagues with her “manly” prints resulted in critical praise and opportunities for exhibition and publication. Beginning in the 1880s and continuing after her death into the first three decades of the twentieth century, her etchings were exhibited and published across the United States and in Europe. As etching’s popularity continued to grow with American audiences, so too did Nimmo Moran’s success; ironically, however, it was etching’s widespread popularity that would ultimately lead to the “revival’s” demise in the early 1890s.

**Exhibitions, Publications, and the End of the Etching “Revival”**

Following her election to the New York Etching Club in 1881, Mary Nimmo Moran participated in the Club’s annual exhibitions every year between 1882 and 1893 with the exception of 1889, when dealer Christian Klackner organized a joint retrospective of her and Moran’s prints, and 1890, when the Club’s exhibition was suspended. 30 To accompany each exhibition, the Club published a luxury catalogue featuring small-plate versions of selected etchings that were displayed in the show. 31 Art historian Patricia Mandel notes that members viewed these catalogues as “works of art, designed to furnish a permanent record rather than merely a guide to the exhibition.” 32 They were sold in limited editions with impressions printed by the established firms of Kimmel & Voigt (1882-1889) and the De Vinne Press (1891-1893).

Nimmo Moran executed small-plate versions of *Twilight* (figure 6.1), *Summer*, *Easthampton* (figure 6.2), *Hook Pond, Easthampton* (figure 6.3), *The Coast of Florida* (figure 6.4) and *The Passaic Meadows* (figure 6.5) to illustrate the catalogues in 1882, 1884, 1885, 1888, and 1892, respectively. Before 1888, she was the only female artist whose etchings were selected

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31 The prints included in the New York Etching Club’s exhibition catalogues were etchings, not reproductions of etchings executed in another medium, such as wood engraving. With the advent steel facing beginning around 1860, artists could extend the printing life of an etching plate and produce an increased number of impressions for publication in catalogues, portfolios, and treatises without sacrificing image quality or detail. Unless otherwise noted, all of Nimmo Moran’s prints were published as etchings.

for illustration and the frequency with which her prints were reproduced rivaled in number those of male members, including Henry Farrer, Stephen Parrish, and James D. Smillie.33 This speaks to the popularity of her work with fellow painter-etchers and the public, for her prints were undoubtedly selected to increase the aesthetic appeal and commercial potential of the publication.

Over the course of the 1880s, her original etchings were in high-demand with print clubs, curators, and dealers, who exhibited, published, and sold her works with increased frequency. In 1881, Koehler selected seven of her original prints for inclusion in the first major exhibition of American etchings held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.34 On view from April 11 to May 9, 1881, the show featured more than 500 etchings by 104 American artists, as well as a selection of more than 200 etchings by European artists such as Rembrandt, Van Dyke, Turner, Daubigny, Méryon, and Haden, among others. Several of the American works were listed for sale and Nimmo Moran’s prints were priced at the high end of the spectrum: *Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.* (figure 4.11) was her most expensive print listed at $15.00 (approximately $360.00 in 2015), which was also the highest price asked for prints by Samuel Colman, J.M. Falconner, Charles Miller, Thomas Moran, and Joseph Pennell.35 At least one of her etchings sold from this exhibition: the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, purchased an impression of *Twilight, Easthampton*

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35 There were only three prints priced higher than $15.00: Henry Farrer’s *On the Hillside* (cat. no. 110); William E. Marshall’s *On the Heights by Moonlight. View of New York from Jersey City* (cat. no. 223); and Peter Moran’s *Low Tide on the Schuylkill* (cat. no. 274). Each print was listed for $25.00. Ibid., 21, 26, and 29.
(figure 6.6) for the asking price of $10.00 (approximately $240.00 in 2015). It was the first of the artist’s etchings to enter a museum collection.36

In addition to the financial incentives, this prestigious exhibition offered Nimmo Moran the opportunity to display her recent prints alongside the works of contemporary painter-etchers and celebrated European masters. The show generated significant public interest in the medium, bolstering her professional reputation and bringing her work to the attention of fellow artists, critics, and collectors. In December 1882, seventeen of her prints were featured in the First Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Etchers held at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.37 As a woman artist, she was prohibited from club membership, but her etchings were praised in the press nevertheless. When reviewing the exhibition for the Philadelphia-based newspaper The Continent, critic Leslie W. Miller singled out the artist for “particular notice,” writing: “I doubt whether in the work of any etcher in American or in Europe are to be found more painter-like qualities than hers exhibit.”38

Accompanying Miller’s review was a wood-engraved reproduction of Nimmo Moran’s original etching Conway Castle, Wales (figure 6.7), executed during her 1882 trip to Great Britain. After debuting the print with the Philadelphia Society of Etchers, she displayed it at the 1883 annual exhibition of the New York Etching Club, where it caught the attention of The Art Amateur for its “telling use of fine, clearly-drawn line-work.”39 This notice may have encouraged her to send an impression to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1885, where it was one of the ten etchings she displayed in the Special Exhibition of Works of The New York Etching Club,

36 This impression was acquired on July 25, 1881 with money from the Museum’s “Everett Statue Fund,” established in 1875. A hand-written label affixed to lower left corner of this impression reads: “Purchased from / Etching Exhibition 1881. for $10.–”
and Other Etchers. Moreover, the print’s historic subject – a medieval fortification built by Edward I on the north coast of Wales – appealed to European audiences, as it was a popular subject with Romantic painters, notably J.M.W. Turner. In 1883, an impression of Nimmo Moran’s *Conway Castle* was included in an international exhibition of graphic art in Vienna. Nine years later, the print reappeared in a Viennese publication on the history of etching in Europe and North America – a further indication of the international interest in her work.

The artist also exhibited her etched landscapes of Easton, Newark, and East Hampton in England, first with the Society of Painter-Etchers in London in 1881 and 1882, and then with Thomas Moran at Bromley’s Art Gallery in Bolton in 1882. In 1884, she was one of nineteen American painter-etchers whose works were selected by Haden for display in the Fourteenth Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool. The artist’s reputation abroad was enhanced by her four-month visit to Great Britain in 1882, during which time she and Moran rented a flat in London and met Francis Seymour Haden and John Ruskin.

Haden invited the Morans to his home in Mayfair, where, according to Thurman Wilkins, they examined “the surgeon-etcher’s proofs…To study them must have been a superlative treat to such etching aficionados as the Morans.” Ruskin, who had famously described etching as “an indolent and blundering method,” nevertheless took an interest in the work of Nimmo

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40 Cat. nos. 2, 6, 9, 15, 24, 33, 34, 40, 42, and 45 in *Special Exhibition of Works of the New York Etching Club, and Other Etchings* (Chicago: The Art Institute, 1885), 3-4.
41 Cat. nos. 106-110 in *Illustriert Katalog Der Ersten Internationalen Special-Ausstellung der Graphischen Künste in Wien* (Wien: Verlag der Gesellschaft für Vervielfältigende Kunst, 1883), 155. The catalogue lists Nimmo Moran as an exhibitor, but it does not enumerate the titles or number of prints exhibited. However, an impression of *Conway Castle, Wales* in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (K1494) bears the inscription “sent to Vienna,” indicating that the print may have been included in the show.
42 Nimmo Moran’s *Conway Castle, Wales* was one of forty etchings featured in Richard Graul, *Die Radierung der Gegenwart in Europa und Nordamerika* (Wien: Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst, 1892).
44 Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains*, 2nd Rev. Ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998): 225-229. Wilkins notes that the Morans also met Whistler during their trip; however, he provides no citation for this assertion and I have found no documentation to support his claim.
Moran. He visited the couple in their London flat and, as Ruth Moran later wrote, “almost at once fell in love with my mother – everyone did – and offered her, after half an hour of looking at her etchings and at her – his home in the English Lakes for the summer!”

Local newspapers reported upon the favorable reception of Nimmo Moran’s prints: the Manchester Guardian described her etchings as “high class,” while the Bolton Daily Chronicle reported that Ruskin had purchased from the Morans “two pictures and six etchings (including three by Mrs. Moran, who is the only lady member of the London Society of Painter-Etchers)... Though he does not admire etching as a method of art expression, he was much pleased with the work in that line by both Mr. and Mrs. Moran, and thought that the latter had a ‘grand style’ for etching.” Ruskin later ordered duplicate impressions of the three prints he acquired from Nimmo Moran, including her Bridge over the Delaware, Easton, Pa.

His esteem for her work was likely the result of her intimate approach to the natural landscape rather than her etching technique. Writing to Thomas Moran in December 1882, Ruskin encouraged him to “give up – for a while all that flaring and glaring and splashing and rearing triumph – and paint, not etch – some quiet things like that little tree landscape absolutely from nature.” Ruskin’s preference for quiet things drawn from nature certainly explains his interest in Nimmo Moran’s prints and his support enhanced her reputation with critics and collectors both at home and abroad.

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49 On September 9, 1882, The Critic reported that Ruskin “termed Mrs. Moran’s style of etching ‘grand,’ and ordered duplicates of the specimens he had bought.” In a letter to Moran dated December 27, 1882, Ruskin wrote that he had received the works, including “the beautiful bridge by Mrs. Moran.” “Art Notes,” The Critic (September 9, 1882): 245 and John Ruskin, letter to Thomas Moran, December 27, 1882 quoted in Ibid., 236.
50 John Ruskin, letter to Thomas Moran, December 27, 1882 quoted in Ibid., 236.
In addition to art galleries and museums, Nimmo Moran’s prints were displayed in industrial expositions, including the 1880 Inter-State Industrial Exposition of Chicago, the 1881 Milwaukee Industrial Exposition, and the 1881 Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association in Boston. As noted in Chapter Two, emerging manufacturing cities across the Midwest and the South hosted annual expositions to assert their contributions to America’s industrial development. These expositions frequently featured art departments for the display of paintings, sculptures, and prints, creating new markets for American art well beyond the eastern seaboard.

In 1888, six of her prints were featured in a large-scale display of graphic art at the Ohio Valley Centennial Exhibition held in Cincinnati. Organized by Koehler – who was then serving as the Smithsonian’s Graphic Arts curator – this section was composed of nearly 1,000 prints, including approximately 250 American etchings, one fifth of which were executed by women. Moreover, after her untimely death, Thomas Moran continued to exhibit her etchings across the country, sending seven impressions to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis and four to the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

Her landscape etchings were also widely circulated in art journals, popular magazines, printmaking manuals, luxury portfolios, and auction catalogues. Over the course of the 1880s,

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53 The catalogue accompanying this exhibition lists the number of prints each artist exhibited, but not the titles. For a complete list of the women etchers included in the show, see frames 85 to 94 in Sylvester Rosa Koehler, “Catalogue of the Contributions of the Section of Graphic Arts to the Ohio Valley Centennial Exposition, Cincinnati, 1888” in *Proceedings of the U.S. National Museum* 10, Appendix (1888): 722.

dealers and publishers capitalized on the market’s seemingly insatiable demand for original prints. Although *The American Art Review* folded in 1881, Koehler’s journal had set in motion the widespread popularity of painter-etchings with American collectors. In 1912, curator Frank Weitenkampf reflected back on this era in American printmaking and aptly observed:

The ‘American Art Review’ went out of existence, but the seed was sown, and a number of sumptuous volumes, published in limited editions, and often in various forms to suit different pocketbooks…There were ‘Original Etching by American Artists’ (1884), and ‘American Etchings’ (1886), both with text by S.R. Koehler; ‘Recent American Etchings’ (1885), ‘Notable Etchings by American Artists’ (1886), and ‘Representative Etchings by Artists of Today in America’ (1887), all three with text by J. Ripley W. Hitchcock; ‘Some Modern Etchings’ (1886); and ‘Famous Etchers’ (1889).55

Weitenkampf’s list – which is by no means a complete bibliography – illustrates the growing appeal of etching portfolios and catalogues, as the “revival” transitioned from an elite movement aimed at connoisseurs to a widely popular “craze” or “mania.”

Koehler continued to write and edit etching texts in the aftermath of *The American Art Review*. In 1885, he published a practical manual titled *Etching: An Outline of its Technical Processes and its History* that included, among other prints, Nimmo Moran’s *Haunt of the Muskrat* (figure 5.33). He also collaborated with the New York Etching Club to edit two volumes of contemporary American painter-etchings, including *Original Etchings by American Artists* (1883) and *Twenty Original American Etchings* (1885), which featured Nimmo Moran’s “‘Tween the Gloamin’ and the Mirk…” (figure 5.26) and *Gardiner’s Bay L.I., Seen From Fresh Ponds* (figure 5.36), respectively.

These two volumes were reissued together in a luxury portfolio printed by Kimmel & Voigt in 1885. Titled *Gems of American Etchers*, it was composed of forty prints released in eight parts or “sections,” each of which included five prints housed in a cloth cover fastened with a black satin ribbon and embellished with gilt lettering. The materials used to compose a

portfolio enhanced its value and appeal with collectors and connoisseurs. Perhaps most notably, the paper upon which the impressions of a portfolio were printed factored into the price of the publication. For instance, in 1886 Koehler edited a volume titled *American Etchings. A Collection of Twenty Original Etchings*, which included Nimmo Moran’s *Solitude* (figure 5.9). Published by Estes and Lauriat, it was limited to an edition of 350 copies: five were printed on parchment in a parchment portfolio; fifteen were printed on satin in a satin portfolio; forty were printed on India paper in a vellum cloth portfolio; forty were printed on Japan paper in a parchment portfolio; and 250 were printed on Holland paper in a cloth portfolio. The objective, as *The Boston Evening Transcript* noted, was “to suit different tastes and purses.”

In addition to luxury portfolios featuring expertly printed examples of Nimmo Moran’s etchings, her works were often reproduced as wood engravings in popular periodicals, including *The Century Magazine, Scribner’s Magazine, and Harper’s Weekly*. Moreover, between 1881 and 1883, critic Ernest Knaufft edited a relatively inexpensive etching portfolio issued in twenty-four parts, priced at fifty cents a part (approximately $12 in 2015). Wrapped in blue paper and published fortnightly, each part included one etching accompanied by a brief description. Knaufft featured the works of well-known artists, including Henry Farrer, William Merritt Chase, and Joseph Pennell, as well as Peter Moran, Thomas Moran, and Mary Nimmo Moran. In the eighteenth part, Knaufft issued Nimmo Moran’s *The Passaic Meadows* (figure 6.5).

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57 “Art in Books,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (December 12, 1885): 11.
58 Van Rensselaer, “American Etchers,” 492 and Frank Weitenkampf, “Some Women Etchers,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 46, no. 6 (December 1909): 733. Thomas Moran recorded that Mary Nimmo Moran’s *A City Farm, New York* (1881, figure 5.38) was published in *Harper’s Weekly*; however, to date, I have not been able to locate a reproduction of this etching in the magazine.
According to dealer Christian Klackner, *The Passaic Meadows* represents “A typical New Jersey landscape, under a cloudy evening effect. After a painting by herself.”60 I have been unable to locate the painting upon which this print was based, but Nimmo Moran executed several replica and reproductive etchings in her career. The term “reproductive” is generally used today to refer to a print executed *after* another artwork; however, in the 1880s, artists and critics often distinguished between “reproductive” prints and what were then known as “replica” prints, or prints executed by an artist after his/her own artwork.61 *The Passaic Meadows* falls into the latter category and these works were typically exhibited, published, and acquired at the same rate as original etchings.62

Print historian David Wright has argued that while critics such as Koehler “favored the creativity and freedom seen in original etchings, he definitely did not overlook the value of reproductive etching and the talent such work required.”63 In fact, more than half of the thirty-five etchings Koehler published in the first year of *The American Art Review* were reproductive, illustrating, as Wright notes, that the “exposure and popularity of these prints was substantial.”64 Trumble adopted a similar outlook: amidst what he described as the “popular mania” for original etchings, the public had come to believe that “reproductive etching had no value whatever.” This, he argued, was “far from the truth”: “Original art is superior to that of the copyist, *if it is*

60 Klackner, 19.
61 For a detailed discussion of these terms, see David G. Wright, “American Reproductive and Replica Etchings: Reflections on the Deluxe Auction Catalogues of the 1880s,” *Imprint* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 14-35.
64 Ibid.
executed with the same skill. Its mere originality will not redeem its blemishes of execution. A good reproduction is a more valuable contribution to art than a poor original etching.”

Throughout the 1880s, replica etchings were often used to illustrate luxury publications, such as the small-plate prints featured in the annual exhibition catalogues of the New York Etching Club. Reproductive etchings, however, were featured prominently in deluxe auction catalogues. Collections slated for auction – of which there were more than 900 in the United States in the 1880s alone – were typically exhibited in advance of the sale to bolster public interest. Catalogues were often produced to accompany these auctions, although illustrated catalogues were reserved for highly publicized sales of noteworthy collections and represent, according to Wright’s calculations, a mere three percent of the auction catalogues produced in the 1880s. Wright argues that these illustrated catalogues, “unequivocally document the era’s reproductive etching talents” and “provide a window into the collecting tastes of the country’s elite, who enjoyed abundant means and were transfixed by the French art of the recent past.”

Between 1886 and 1888, Nimmo Moran was commissioned to execute five reproductive etchings that were featured in three notable illustrated auction catalogues. The first was published in 1886 in conjunction with an auction of Thomas Moran’s work held at the Ortgies Gallery in New York. According to the New York Herald, “Mr. Moran and his wife, Mary Nimmo Moran, leave for a European trip in June, and therefore the former decided to dispose of

66 Wright discusses eight illustrated auction catalogues in detail: the Traux Catalogue (1882); the Runkle Catalogue (1883); the Thomas Moran Catalogue (1886); the Mary Jane Morgan Catalogue (1886); the Stewart Catalogue (1887); the Chapman Catalogue (1888); the Weir and Twatchman Catalogue (1889); and the Stebbins Catalogue (1889). Wright, “American Reproductive and Replica Etchings,” 15-30.
67 Ibid., 15.
68 Ibid.
his unsold works.” The sale featured sixty-three of Thomas Moran’s oil and watercolor paintings, as well as Mary Nimmo Moran’s oil painting *Newark from the Meadows* (figure 2.52). A deluxe catalogue published by the American Art Association accompanied the auction.

Nimmo Moran executed three reproductive etchings after Moran’s paintings for illustration in the catalogue: *The Bathers* (figure 6.8), *A Wooded Landscape* (figure 6.9), and *The Edge of the Forest* (figure 6.10). All three works bear the plate inscription “M.N.M.” and several impressions were also signed in graphite “M. Nimmo Moran.” This may indicate that Nimmo Moran approached these etchings less strictly as reproductions and more freely as interpretations or variations on her husband’s paintings.

When comparing Moran’s oil painting *A Glimpse of Georgica Pond* (figure 6.11) to Nimmo Moran’s reproductive etching (figure 6.10), one can identify the liberties she took when transferring his work to copper. She filled the top third of the composition with foliage, replacing Moran’s luminous clouds and bright blue sky with an intricate web of branches and leaves. By enclosing the scene in a canopy of dense vegetation, she enhanced the intimacy of the landscape. She also added a small figure leaning against a tree in the middle ground of the composition and replaced the cows on the distant shore with a sailboat. Although working from Moran’s painting, she nevertheless altered the image to make it her own.

Moran sold sixty-one of the sixty-four works on display at Ortgies Gallery for a total of $10,321. While this was certainly enough to finance the Morans’ European trip, Nimmo Moran did not accompany her husband in the end, perhaps deciding to remain at home to attend to family matters and their three children. On May 3, 1886, Moran wrote to his wife from Venice,
Italy, noting that the floating city “is all, and more, than travellers have reported of it...But in spite of all its grandeur & magnificence I can not say that I enjoy it: because you are not here...I shall be very glad indeed when the time comes for my return.” Moran drew prolifically while in Venice and he executed more views of the city than any other locale in his career.

Moran’s Venetian scenes were among his best-selling works, for he captured, as art historian Nancy Anderson writes, the city’s “nostalgic fictions...Although gondolas and fishing boats still plied Venetian waters in the 1880s, the point of comparison was with an industrialized America pushing full speed into a new age. In Moran’s paintings Venice served as a dreamy, poetic refuge from rapid change.” Given Nimmo Moran’s predilection for the pre-industrial past, as well as the city’s popularity with contemporary painter-etchers, including Whistler, Otto Bacher, and Frank Duveneck, one can only surmise about the Venetian works she may have produced had she traveled to Italy with Moran in 1886.

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74 Art historian Anne Morand has located more than sixty of the sketches Moran executed in Venice, first in 1886 and then in 1890. The sketches from the two trips are similar in style and most are undated, making it difficult to definitively date these works. Anne Morand, Thomas Moran, the Field Sketches, 1856-1923 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press for the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, 1996), 72-73 and 99, n. 116.
75 Anderson, 124.
76 Thomas Moran visited Venice again in 1890. A passenger list records the arrival of “Thomas Moran / 52 / M” and “Mrs. Thomas Moran / 45 / F / Wife” to New York from Breman, Germany, via Southampton, England, on July 1, 1890. This indicates that Mary Nimmo Moran accompanied her husband on this trip, during which time they visited Venice. However, there are no known sketches or etchings of Venice produced by the artist. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897, Microfilm Serial M237, Roll 550, Line 30-31, List Number 935, online database, Ancestry.com, accessed September 15, 2015. While in Venice in 1890, the Morans purchased a gondola constructed by the Casal Boatyard. It was storied to have been the honeymoon gondola of poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning. Writing to Chicago art dealer R.R. Ricketts (of Moulton & Ricketts) in 1909, Moran described the gondola as “so beautiful and graceful...& so ancient and fine in its carvings, brasses and fittings that we fell in love with it, and decided to have it sent to our Long Island home.” According to The East Hampton Star, “it [the gondola] was brought to this place by the steamer Shelter Island last Sunday morning, hung to the davits, it being so long – some thirty-six feet – that it could not be taken on deck. Tuesday Mr. Moran was in town overseeing its shipment, by teams to East Hampton, where he is to have it placed in Hook Pond.” One week later, the paper reported, “Artist Moran has placed his Venetian gondola upon Hook Pond, and on Tuesday a party consisting of himself, Dr. Herrick, Dr. Monroe, and their ladies, enjoyed a sail around the pond on that novel craft...Mr. Moran has engaged George Fowler as gondolier, who has already become quite proficient in the art of propelling the curious craft.” The gondola is currently in the collection of the Mariners’ Museum, Newport News, Virginia. Thomas Moran, letter to R.R. Ricketts, July 4, 1909 quoted in Wilkins 259; “Village and Town News,” The East Hampton Star (September 6, 1890); and “Village and Town News,” The East Hampton Star (September
The same year that Nimmo Moran executed three reproductive etchings for Moran’s sale at Ortgies Gallery, she was commissioned to complete a reproductive print for inclusion in the Mary Jane Morgan auction catalogue. The wife of a wealthy iron merchant, Morgan amassed an extensive collection of European paintings, engravings, and etchings, as well as jewelry and Chinese porcelains. Following her death in 1885, the American Art Association managed the sale of her collection, publishing both illustrated and non-illustrated versions of the auction catalogue. Priced at $23.50, the illustrated catalogue was bound in ivory vellum and featured twenty-nine reproductive etchings by contemporary American artists, including Gifford, Smillie, Chase, Moran, and Nimmo Moran.\(^7\) Smillie, who documented the details of the commission in his diary, wrote that he was invited to study the Morgan collection for two hours in order to select a work for reproduction. The painting he selected – Alberto Pasini’s *Court Yard, Constantinople* – was then delivered to his studio where it remained for one month.\(^8\)

Nimmo Moran was likely afforded similar privileges and she fittingly selected Narcisse Diaz de la Peña’s *Lane near Fontainebleau* (1863, Kunsthaus Bühler, Stuttgart).\(^9\) A member of the Barbizon School, Diaz was known for his dramatically lit forest interiors freely painted with thick impasto. Peña’s *Lane near Fontainebleau* features a central clearing in the Forest, framed on the left and right by rugged boulders and irregular trees. In her etching (figure 6.12), Nimmo Moran accurately reproduced Diaz’s composition, yet she managed to maintain her very personal, autographic line and the scene could easily be mistaken as an East Hampton landscape.

Following the Mary Jane Morgan auction, impressions of the reproductive etchings featured in

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7. The illustrated catalogue was issued in a limited edition of 500 copies and a more exclusive edition of fifty copies with signed etchings printed on chine-collé. Wright, “American Reproductive and Replica Etchings.” 21.

8. Ibid., 21-22.

the catalogue were exhibited at the 1886 annual exhibition of the New York Etching Club. Nimmo Moran’s *Lane near Fontainebleau (after N. Diaz)* (figure 6.12) was displayed alongside four of her original etchings, indicating her high regard for reproductive work.

Nimmo Moran continued to pursue this line of printmaking, executing two reproductive etchings in 1888. The first was featured in an illustrated auction catalogue published by the American Art Association in conjunction with the sale of Henry T. Champan’s collection of 243 paintings and sculptures, including several works by members of the Barbizon School. Thomas Moran was initially contracted to execute six reproductive etchings for the publication; however, he recruited his wife and son to assist with the commission. In the end, Moran completed four etchings, while Mary Nimmo Moran executed one after a landscape painting by Theodore Rousseau (figure 6.13) and Paul Nimmo Moran executed one after Mariano Fortuny’s *Salem.* Moran’s willingness – or perhaps need – to share the commission with family members reinforces the theory set forth in Chapter Two that the Moran household functioned as a family workshop, with Nimmo Moran assisting her husband with his work when necessary.

The collaboration and artistic dialogue that existed between husband and wife is further evidenced in Nimmo Moran’s final reproductive etching *A California Forest (after Thomas Moran)* (figure 6.14). The print depicts the towering redwoods of Yosemite Valley and was commissioned to illustrate the serial publication *Picturesque California and the Region West of...*
the Rocky Mountains, from Alaska to Mexico." \(^{83}\) Conceived of by the San Francisco-based publisher John Dewing, *Picturesque California* was edited by renowned naturalist John Muir and included thirty essays (seven of which were authored by Muir), 120 plates, and 700 in-text illustrations, including “Etchings, Photogravures, Wood Engravings, Etc. By Eminent American Artists.” \(^{84}\) Inspired by William Cullen Bryant’s *Picturesque America* (1872-1874), *Picturesque California* aimed “to provide the most comprehensive visual coverage of the Far West yet available” and it was, as art historian Sue Rainey writes, “the first major illustrated work on the West produced primarily by westerners.” \(^{85}\)

Although the Morans were not true “westerners,” Thomas Moran’s name was nearly synonymous with the art of the region and his etching *The South Dome, Yosemite Valley* (figure 6.15) was selected to serve as the publication’s frontispiece. \(^{86}\) This print is based on works Moran executed while visiting Yosemite Valley in 1872 (figure 2.8). \(^{87}\) Nimmo Moran had traveled with her husband to Yosemite, where she produced two known works – a wash drawing of South Dome (figure 2.7) and a watercolor of Yosemite Falls (figure 2.9). However, her etching for *Picturesque California* was not based on an earlier work or drawn from memory, but instead on an “Original Sketch by Thomas Moran.” \(^{88}\)

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\(^{84}\) *Picturesque California* was initially published in thirty parts, which were issued monthly and sold by subscription at one dollar a part. The publication was later reissued, first in ten volumes printed on India paper and then in two volumes printed on heavy plate paper. There were also a variety of bindings and boxes available at different price points. On the history and publication of *Picturesque California*, see Sue Rainey, “Picturesque California: How Westerners Portrayed the West in the Age of John Muir,” *Common-Place* 7, no. 3 (April 2007), accessed online, August 28, 2015, [http://www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-03/rainey/](http://www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-03/rainey/).

\(^{85}\) Ibid.


\(^{87}\) In addition to *The Half Dome*, Moran’s *The Royal Gorge and Sultan Mountains* were reproduced in *Picturesque California*. Plate numbers 76 and 78 in Muir, ed., *Picturesque California*, 300 and 308.

\(^{88}\) I have not been able to identify the precise sketch that Nimmo Moran was working from, but it was most likely a work Moran executed during the couple’s trip to Yosemite in 1872.
Of the more than 800 illustrations featured in *Picturesque California*, Nimmo Moran’s *A California Forest (after Thomas Moran)* (figure 6.14) was one of only fifteen etchings. The work accompanied John Muir’s extensive essay on Yosemite Valley and a tissue guard placed over the image featured a quote from the naturalist: “All the different species [of trees] stand more or less apart in groves or small irregular groups, through which the roads meander, making delightful ways along sunny colonnades and across openings that have a smooth surface strewn with brown needles and cones.” By cropping off the tops of the trees and including a diminutive figure in the middle distance, Nimmo Moran emphasized the monumentality of Yosemite’s redwoods. In the distance, a row of faintly etched trees enhances the density of the forest interior, forming a natural colonnade in the landscape. In addition to her signature “M.N. Moran 1888,” she added Thomas Moran’s monogram (composed of an overlapping “T” and “M”) in the lower right corner of the plate – an indication of the couple’s artistic collaboration and a culmination of their twenty-plus years of drawing, painting, and etching side by side.

Nimmo Moran was at the height of her career when she was commissioned to execute the reproductive etchings featured in the Moran, Morgan, and Chapman auction catalogues, as well as Muir’s *Picturesque California*. By 1888, she was a respected and sought-after artist, described by *The Boston Evening Transcript* as “easily first among the women etchers.” Her position as such was solidified by Koehler’s historic *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America* held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1887. Nimmo Moran displayed fifty-four etchings – more than any other artist – and later enlarged her display to fifty-six etchings when an expanded version of the show traveled to New York’s Union League Club in 1888.

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90 The two etchings that Nimmo Moran added to the New York venue are *Landscape (after Theodore Rousseau)* (figure 6.13) and *A California Forest (after Thomas Moran)* (figure 6.14).
Peet argues that the exhibition was organized “to draw attention to a remarkable development: that a large number of American women had not only become professional artists, but they had mastered a special skill, etching, and had produced a sufficient quantity of notable, quality work which had brought them institutional recognition.”91 The exhibition went a long way in disproving the myth that women etchers were merely amateurs and dilettantes. By assembling their work at an esteemed public museum, Koehler was, according to Peet, “recognizing women as art professionals and the arts as an acceptable profession for women. In this he contributed to women’s sense of self-esteem and confidence…the exhibition documented many professional women etchers and gave the first art-institutional recognition to women artists in the form of a prestigious museum show.”92

Peet’s use of the term “document” is important since the exhibition was not juried but instead aimed to chronicle the development of the medium in the work of American women artists. In the introduction to the Boston catalogue, Koehler explained that “it is but right to say that no selection has been made, but that all the works sent in have been hung…As to the work of the individual contributors, it is presented as fully as each cared to make it, and in most cases the lists are probably complete.”93 Van Rensselaer supported Koehler’s all-inclusive curatorial strategy, writing that the etchings had,

…not been gathered in any critical spirit. The desire has been to reveal what the women etchers of America have accomplished – not what, in the belief of any judge, is the best they have accomplished…it was likewise felt that it was but right that a class of workers who had shown such energy in treading a newly opened path should be allowed to say –

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91 Peet, “The Emergence of American Women Printmakers in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 292.
92 Ibid., 293-294.
93 Sylvester Rosa Koehler, Introduction to Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America (Boston), 4. He adopted a similar strategy when curating the graphic arts section at the Ohio Valley Centennial Exposition held in Cincinnati in 1888. Helena E. Wright describes his approach as intentionally “taxonomic,” noting that he “used examples of printmaking processes to illustrate chronological increments toward technical perfection.” Wright, “The Smithsonian in Cincinnati,” 134.
as many individuals as possible, and each individual as fully as she saw fit – in what manner and to what degree they had achieved success.\textsuperscript{94}

There were mixed reactions to Koehler’s documentary, more-is-more approach. Contemporary painter-etcher Blanche Dillaye argued that, “the exhibition was unfair through too liberal an acceptance of experimental plates, which should be relegated to the obscurity of early struggles. Power and capacity should be judged by the height we are able to reach in our best and most lofty moments.”\textsuperscript{95} Moreover, there were women artists staunchly opposed to the exhibition of women’s work in a separate – i.e. inferior – sphere. A decade after the exhibition, artist Anna Lea Merritt, who had exhibited forty-six works in the show, wrote that “attempts to make separate exhibitions of women’s work were in opposition to the views of the artists concerned, who knew that it would lower their standard and risk the place they already occupied. What we so strongly desire is a place in the large field.”\textsuperscript{96}

Mary Cassatt adopted a similar position: although twenty-four of her etchings were included in the \textit{Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America} and she painted a mural for the Woman’s Building at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, on at least one occasion she expressed great displeasure after learning that her works were being exhibited with other “ladies” in the United States. Writing to art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in 1898, Cassatt asserted: “I have just received a letter from a lady secretary of the Ladies Art League, telling me that you promised her a choice of my pictures belonging to you to show in the exhibition that these ladies

\textsuperscript{94} Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, \textit{Introduction to Exhibition Catalogue of the Work of the Women Etchers of America} (New York), 3-4.
\textsuperscript{96} Anna Lea Merritt, “A Letter to Artists: Especially Women Artists,” \textit{Lippincott's Monthly Magazine} 65 (1900): 467. In addition to sending etchings to Koehler’s exhibition, Merritt was a member of The Plastic Club, composed of women artists in Philadelphia, and she painted a mural for the vestibule of the Woman’s Building at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. On the contradictory attitudes of women artists on a separate sphere for women’s work, see Phyllis Peet, \textit{American Women of the Etching Revival} (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1888), 33-37.
are going to have…I refuse absolutely and I believe that you will not profit at all in showing my work in this exhibition… I doubt that this practice will do me any good, nor you.”

To my knowledge, Mary Nimmo Moran did not write about separate exhibitions of women’s work, yet she must not have been too opposed to it since she contributed prints to Koehler’s exhibition. In response to the curator’s invitation to participate in the show, Thomas Moran wrote to Koehler on June 5, 1887: “Mrs. M asks me to write for her to say that she will send as complete a sett [sic] of her works for your exhibit of the Women Etchers of America as she can get together, but wishes to know in what form to send them, whether mounted or not, or if they are wanted framed…Please reply at once as many are out of print and would have to have new proof[s] taken.” Over the next five months, Nimmo Moran compiled impressions of every etching she had executed to date. The final display offered audiences an unprecedented opportunity to view her etched oeuvre in its entirety, from her first experimental test proof *On the St. John’s River, Florida* (figure 4.3) to her more recent reproductive etchings.

The artist greatly benefitted from Koehler’s exhibition strategy and several critics commented upon the advantage of examining Nimmo Moran’s aesthetic and technical development over time. *The Boston Evening Transcript* noted that, “Fifty-four of her plates are shown, constituting an exhibit of great variety and original force…Her ‘Haunted House’ [figure 6.15] is a romantic and strongly colored plate, in a vein quite peculiar to herself, but the smaller and less elaborately worked etchings, and particularly those done since 1881, in which a constant improvement in drawing is noticed, are to be preferred.” After the opening of the exhibition at

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98 Thomas Moran, letter to Sylvester Rosa Koehler, June 5, 1887, L-14, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection. I would like to thank Gina Piastuck, Department Head, Long Island Collection, for locating this letter on my behalf.
the Union League Club, *The Critic* similarly remarked that, “Mrs. Mary Nimmo Moran’s achievements may be studied to advantage in this group of fifty-six etchings – her entire output. The great beauties of her plates were never thrown into stronger relief; nor her one fault – redundancy of line.”\(^{100}\) Both reviews allude to the new direction Nimmo Moran’s printmaking took after 1886, when she began working on a larger scale, devising highly-finished, densely-etched compositions that rely heavily on linear detail.

The “Haunted House” referred to above (figure 6.16) is one of two large-scale works that Nimmo Moran executed in 1886. Measuring 15-1/4 inches high by 19 inches wide, it depicts an abandoned home atop East Hampton’s “Pudding Hill.” According to historian Jeanette Edwards Rattray, the hill’s name dates back to the American Revolution, when a defiant young woman destroyed a pot of pudding by throwing it down the hill rather than turning it over to the British soldiers who occupied Long Island. A year after Nimmo Moran completed the etching, the land was sold and the house was torn down to make way for a new summer mansion.\(^{101}\) She may have been interested in depicting the site given its historical significance, yet the representation of a dilapidated architectural ruin being consumed by nature was a popular romantic motif adopted to evoke a sense of pathos or nostalgia.\(^{102}\)

Thematically and stylistically, *The Haunted House, Easthampton* is similar to her earlier etchings: through a strategic application of plate tone, she enhanced light and dark contrasts to

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\(^{101}\) Rattray notes that when the new mansion was being constructed, workmen found Revolutionary cannon balls and British uniform buttons buried on the property. For more on this history of “Pudding Hill,” see Jeanette Edwards Rattray, *Up and Down Main Street: An Informal History of East Hampton and its Old Houses* (East Hampton: The East Hampton Star, 1968), 16-18.

\(^{102}\) On one impression of the print (Gilcrease Museum, 1426.122C), a partially erased graphite inscription in Nimmo Moran’s handwriting reads, “…of colonial days, Easthampton, L.I.,” an indication that she was aware of the site’s Revolutionary history. Moreover, in the fifty-ninth annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts held in 1889, the etching was exhibited under the title *A Relic of Revolutionary Times: Easthampton, L.I.* Peter H. Falk and Anna Wells Rutledge, *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Madison: Sound View Press, 1988), 341.
dramatize and poeticize a seemingly ordinary corner of the natural landscape. In one impression printed by Henry Voigt, the scene is transformed from twilight to midnight with a full moon added to the sky through selective wiping (figure 6.17). Yet the plate’s large size combined with the incredible level of etched detail – notably in the foreground foliage – reflects a shift in the artist’s style. When compared to the spontaneous lines rapidly incised to depict foreground foliage in plates such as *Sandy Paths* (figure 5.10) and *Near the Beach, Easthampton* (figure 5.19-5.20), the etched lines of *The Haunted House* appear more controlled and composed.

As noted, the artist’s small-scale, seemingly spontaneous impressions were not necessarily the result of rapid execution. She often reworked her plates, altered her compositions, and applied various tools and techniques over the course of multiple states. She refined her larger plates in a similar manner, yet the resulting images are more elaborate, finished, and composed. There are two states of Nimmo Moran’s *Where Through The Willows Creaking Loud, Is Heard the Busy Mill* (figures 6.18 and 6.19): in the second state, she thickened the foliage of the central tree, added a young girl to the fishing boat and birds to the sky. Yet when compared to *The Goose Pond, Easthampton* (figure 5.18), which depicts the same site etched five years earlier, the transformation in her work is evident, as the irregular, uneven, and twisting lines of *The Goose Pond* appear to have been tamed and replaced by steady, consistent, and uniform lines.

The artist’s new approach is also evident in the four etchings she executed on a trip to Florida in 1887. These works, which were displayed in the *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America*, include *Point Isabel, Florida* (figure 6.20), *A Florida Forest* (figure 6.21), *The Borders of Lake Isabel, Florida* (figure 6.22), and *The Rose Walk, Villa Alexandria, Florida* (figure 6.23). The latter work resembles a pencil sketch (figure 2.41) Nimmo Moran drew on her

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103 Although early in her career Nimmo Moran often printed her own impressions using the etching press in her home-studio, when executing larger plates such as *The Haunted House*, she typically worked with professional printing firms.
first trip to Florida in 1877, when the Morans stayed with Alexander and Martha Reed Mitchell at their palatial residence the Villa Alexandria in Jacksonville.104

In each etching, she captured the variety and density of Florida’s tropical landscape with great precision and detail. *A Florida Forest* (figure 6.21) and *The Borders of Lake Isabel* (figure 6.22) were drawn from the depths of a seemingly impenetrable swamp, evoking a sense of obscurity and mystery reminiscent of her wood engraving *A Scene in the Tropics* (figure 2.38). Writing in *The Art Stationer*, critic A. De Montaigu praised *A Florida Forest* “for its fidelity to nature and its minute attention to detail…each leaf and branch presents a realistic picture. The woods are a tangled mass of tropical verdure, trailing vines and hanging parasites; above the dense undergrowth rise the feathery, fern-like palms, lifting their heads almost to the heavens, while the branches of the live-oak trees overshadow the pool of dark sluggish water, which sleeps calmly beneath the burning rays of the Southern sun.”105

De Montaigu contrasts the density of *A Florida Forest* with her *Point Isabel, Florida* (figure 6.20), which he notes was executed in “a different style…scarcely a tree or shrub shades the solitary spot and the barren wave-washed strand presents the appearance of supreme desolation. Treated by a less skilled hand, the scene would be tiresome, monotonous, and lacking in interest. Instead, it bears the stamp of originality and is imbued with a strong poetic sentiment. By connoisseurs it is classed among the most finished works of Mrs. Moran.”106 The openness of the *Point Isabel* landscape certainly contrasts with the impenetrability of the overgrown vegetation in *A Florida Forest*, yet the “finished” quality that De Montaigu highlights is characteristic of the etchings she executed after 1886.

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104 Aside from Nimmo Moran’s four etchings, there is little documentary evidence related to the couple’s 1887 visit, but they likely stayed with the Mitchells again since Nimmo Moran executed *The Rose Walk* from their property.


106 Ibid., 6.
With the exception of *The Rose Walk*, her 1887 Floridian etchings were executed on large copper plates. The artist’s move from small, handheld plates to much larger ones reflects a new trend among contemporary American painter-etchers, many of whom adopted the larger format to meet the market’s growing demand for decorative framing prints. *Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond* (figures 6.24 and 6.25) is the largest etching she produced in her career: drawn on a copper plate measuring 19-1/2 inches high by 30-3/4 inches wide, it is more than three times the size of her first East Hampton etching, *Easthampton, Barrens* (figure 4.26). Despite the plate’s large physical size, the artist maintained her intimate approach to nature, depicting a quiet forest interior with Georgica Pond visible through a natural archway of old oak trees. In the first state of the plate, she included a reclining figure at the base of a tree in the left foreground (figure 6.24). Yet she removed the figure in the second and final state of the plate, allowing the viewer to observe the landscape in isolation (figure 6.25).

There was considerable debate over the growing size and high finish of etching plates, which were often disparagingly referred to as “engraver-etchings.” In 1886, a critic writing in *The Art Review* defended engraver-etchings, arguing that it was “a hopeful sign to find the American public appreciating the etched-line in preference to cheap chromos, woodcuts, and lithographs.” A critic in *The New York Times* similarly argued in favor of the democratization of etching, challenging another critic’s negative appraisal of popular, “decorative” prints:

> Perhaps the critic takes too gloomy a view of the matter. Certainly a protest might be in order against his sneer at the popular use of etchings to “decorate” country homes, as if that were a sort of crime. It is not given to many to be connoisseurs; it is not possible for many to own a portfolio full of treasures. But we may be glad that fashion has made it right that walls hitherto given over to poor photographs and worse chromo-lithographs should be ‘decorated’ with etchings. Why not?

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On the other hand, many artists and critics deplored etching’s transformation. Whistler, for example, asserted that, “the huge plate…is an offense, – its undertaking an unbecoming display of determination and ignorance, – its accomplishment a triumph of unthinking earnestness and uncontrolled energy – endowments of the ‘duffer.’”\(^{109}\) Large, elaborate plates were often criticized for subverting the intimacy and sketchiness of “true” etching: in 1888, Van Rensselaer warned that etching was,

…in danger of degenerating into mistaken rivalry with certain other forms of graphic expression…the true charms and virtues which an etching should have – succinct expression by means of line, clear contrasts of black and white unconfused by over-ambitious attempts to render ‘full tone,’ and the preservation of the peculiar quality of the bitten or dry-point stroke – are in danger of being forgotten or despised…there is a growing demand for large, showy, ‘finished’ etchings which try to be as unlike etchings, as like steel engravings or elaborate drawings as possible.”\(^{110}\)

It would seem that several of Nimmo Moran’s late prints fall into the category of “large, showy, ‘finished’ etchings,” yet critics often gave the artist’s prints a pass. Trumble, for example, criticized Charles Adams Platt and Thomas Moran for their “concession to the popular sentiment,” yet asserted that Nimmo Moran “has not bowed to the new gospel in etching.” He concluded that her “art has always been too experimental and unique to come under the head of popular. Her methods of production, her entire reliance on nature for material, and her direct and forcible touch, remain a charm for the connoisseur that the unelect cannot experience.”\(^{111}\) His comments were of the highest praise, for similar to Baudelaire and Hamerton, Trumble believed

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111 Trumble, “Etching in America,” 28.
that etching’s “merits of suggestion and its charms of style appealed only to cultured eyes and sympathetic intelligences.”\textsuperscript{112}

Despite Trumble’s assertion that Nimmo Moran’s work was too original to be popular, her large, elaborate painter-etchings, such as \textit{Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond}, were aimed at a mainstream American audience, who, according to art historian Francine Tyler, had come to prefer “a large, ‘decorative’ full-toned etching which looked more like a monotone painting, or even a photograph. Properly displayed in a large, ornate frame, it was deemed suitable to decorate the walls of the house…Americans wanted pictures, and oils cost too much. They demanded in prints ‘as much of a picture as possible for the money.’”\textsuperscript{113} Etching’s widespread popularity and commercial potential led many printers and publishers amok: new technological advances, including electrotyping and steel facing allowed for the printing of a seemingly limitless number of impressions. As Tyler notes, “Many firms…in their desire to make as much money as possible, while promoting the art interest into a booming fad, used questionable practices on a gullible and largely uninformed public.”\textsuperscript{114}

This included the proliferation of remarque proofs: drawn by an artist in the margin of the plate, a remarque – or a small sketch – traditionally appeared on early proofs before it was removed (or wore off) for the printing of the final edition. Collectors and connoisseurs valued remarque proofs for their high quality and rarity, yet with the advent of steel facing, a large number of high-quality impressions could be pulled from the plate. As a result, remarques took on a purely decorative function and were typically added to impressions simply to enhance their

\textsuperscript{112} Trumble, “Etching in America,” 27.
\textsuperscript{113} Francine Tyler, \textit{American Etchings of the Nineteenth Century} (New York: Dover Publications, 1984), x.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., xv.
Nimmo Moran’s oeuvre was not impervious to this new trend: she added remarques to at least three of her plates, including a dragonfly to *Where Through the Willows* (figure 6.18), a salamander to *A Florida Forest* (figure 6.21), and a shell to *Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond* (figure 6.25).

Moreover, to enhance the exclusivity and monetary value of etched impressions, dealers and publishers often limited editions and varied the papers upon which they were printed. For instance, when Nimmo Moran’s *Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond* was exhibited at Klackner’s Gallery in 1889, the print was offered in three limited editions on two types of paper; the entry in the catalogue reads:

- Remark Proofs on Parchment, limited to 25 impressions…$60.00
- Remark Proofs on Japanese paper, limited to 100 impressions…30.00
- Artist’s Proofs on Japanese paper, limited to 100 impression…20.00
- PLATE DESTROYED.**

By adding a remarque, printing on different papers, and limiting the number of impressions, Klackner was able to increase the price of the print and manufacture a false sense of value.

On November 16, 1888, Klackner deposited a remarque proof of *Under the Oaks, Georgica Pond* at the Library of Congress to copyright the image.** He had previously copyrighted examples of Nimmo Moran’s prints, including *The Edge of Georgica Pond* (figure 5.35), *Old Lindens, Near Easthampton* (figure 5.55), and *Georgica Pond, Looking Seaward* (figure 6.25). This was a common practice in the mid-1880s: after the United States copyright

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**Thomas Bruhn, *American Etching: The 1880s* (Storrs: William Benton Museum of Art, 1985), 9. Bruhn documents one instance in which Thomas Moran added a remarque to a print six years after it was etched.

** Klackner, 22. Although limited to a select number of impressions, the prints in each edition were not numbered. The practice of numbering impressions was not widely adopted by artists and publishers until the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, by indicating that the plate had been destroyed, Klackner inflated the value and rarity of available impressions.

law was revised in 1870 to include “paintings, drawings, sculpture and models or designs for works of the fine arts,” commercial publishers began copyrighting images in order to protect their investment. Copyrighting an image allowed a publisher to limit and control the number of impressions printed, thereby enhancing the commercial value of those impressions and assuaging buyers’ fears about the possibility of limitless reproductions.

In addition to Klackner, the New York publishing firm Fishel, Adler & Schwartz copyrighted Nimmo Moran’s *Where Through The Willows*... in 1887 and the artist copyrighted *Point Isabel, Florida* in 1888. She exhibited the latter work in the first exhibition of the Society of American Etchers, held at the Ortgies Gallery in November 1888. Founded in June 1888, the Society was formed by twenty artists including Moran, who served as a director, and Nimmo Moran, who was the only founding female member. When reviewing the Society’s exhibition, *The New York Times* noted that the group was formed “for the purpose of guaranteeing the edition of etchings which are sold at high prices on the understanding that said edition is limited to a certain number. Hitherto the buyer has had to trust the honor or the good memory of the artist or publisher of plate. Now the little stamp affixed to an etching means that the society guarantees the edition be limited to whatever number of impressions there may be.”

A circular blind stamp bearing the Society’s name was affixed to impressions of Nimmo Moran’s *Point Isabel, Florida* (figure 6.20). The letter code in the center, which reads “AL /

119 The following year, the Society mounted an exhibition of member etchings at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where Nimmo Moran exhibited three works: *Point Isabel, Florida* (exhibited under the title *On the Florida Coast*); *Borders of Lake Isabel, Florida* (exhibited under the title *A Florida Swamp*); and *The Haunted House* (exhibited under the title *A Relic of Revolutionary Times: Easthampton, L.I.*). Falk and Rutledge, 341.
AA,” was an indication to the “initiated not only who etched the plate, but the number of each particular etching.” The Times noted that Nimmo Moran produced “no ordinary prints [of Point Isabel, Florida] at all, the edition being limited to artists’ proofs and other first impressions.”\(^{122}\) However, the copper plate (currently in the collection of the Gilcrease Museum) is steel-faced, indicating that it may have been printed in a larger edition than initially planned.

Although the Society aimed to counter the commercialization of etching by limiting editions and controlling the publication process, its efforts were too little, too late. In 1891, Trumble reported:

> The degradation of the print publishing business of New York is illustrated with melancholy distinctness by every print-shop window. The American publisher, with but a couple of honorable exceptions, seems quite oblivious…else the incredible rubbish which is now dignified with remarques and signatures, and impressions on parchment and japan, would not see the light. The ultimate destination of all this stuff must be the bargain-counter of the dry-goods bazar. The publishers, in their eager competition to cut each other’s throats, are practically putting the knife to their own jugulars.\(^{123}\)

Two years later, when critic Henry Russell Wray wrote A Review of Etching in the United States, he could assert that, “commercially, the etching fad is over in America.”\(^{124}\) When etching was first “revived” in the United States in late 1870s, it was positioned as an elite medium intended for a small, cultivated audience; a decade later, it had developed into a widely popular, commercial medium, whose value would soon collapse “under the weight of its own bloated market.”\(^{125}\) Art historian Rona Schneider succinctly summarizes the “revival’s” central contradiction – a contradiction, she argues, that ultimately led to its downfall:

> Mixed messages were sent by artists and critics: 1. Etchings were an intellectual art form, to be made and understood by a select group of thoughtful people, OR 2. Etchings should be made in large editions and available to the multitudes, thereby elevating the general


level of education and taste. This ambivalence between exclusivity and mass appeal was never resolved, and it was at the heart of the demise of the etching revival.126

Nimmo Moran’s etched oeuvre illustrates this struggle: she executed small, intimate works praised for their unconventional technique and bold originality; yet the success of her imagery combined with etching’s inherent multiplicity enabled her to increase the size of her printed editions and later the size of her copper plates. Initially, she benefitted from the movement’s growing popularity; yet in the end, Wilkins writes, “the market was glutted, falling prey to over-production…Moran lived to see both his and Mollie’s etchings devalued.”127

The consensus among print historians is that professional painter-etchers abandoned the medium as a result of its over-commercialization. Yet one also has to wonder if the growing presence and success of professional women etchers played a role in the movement’s disintegration. Swinth has documented the anxiety that swept the art world as a result of women’s advances in the field: “By 1890, commentators and critics claimed that women were winning the ‘race’ for art and outpacing men in their achievement. A backlash set in that fundamentally reoriented the art world. Institutionally, market structures grew smaller and more exclusive, especially as the gallery-dealer system developed. Rhetorically, rebellion against cultural refinement bred a new masculinity in criticism based on biological and Darwinian notions of creativity.”128 Etching seems to have been another casualty of this backlash. Shortly after the success of the Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America, which featured hundreds of prints by professional women printmakers, etching was abandoned as a medium for original expression. Artists may have felt that etching was not only commercialized, but also feminized – too closely associated with popular culture and women artists.

126 Schneider, 5.
127 Wilkins, 253.
128 Swinth, Painting Professionals, 5.
Building off of the positive response to Nimmo Moran’s “truly remarkable oeuvre” on display at the *Exhibition of the Work of the Women Etchers of America*, Klackner organized a retrospective exhibition of her and Thomas Moran’s etchings at his New York City gallery.\(^{129}\) The show opened in March 1889 and featured sixty of Nimmo Moran’s works – all but one of the plates she is known to have executed in her career.\(^{130}\) The *New-York Daily Tribune* favorably reviewed the show, writing of Nimmo Moran’s display:

> Here is the vigorous “Goose Pond,” the artist’s diploma plate, with the “Haunt of the Muskrat,” simple but large in design, the admirable “Looking Seaward,” the “Hook Pond” and “Montauk Hills,” and other plates characterized by reserve as well as by unusual vigor of line. The “Twilight” and “Point Isabel” show the artist’s ready ability to adjust methods to different effects, and there are the varying interpretations of scenes about Georgica Pond which deserve attention…The merit of Mrs. Moran’s work has been recognized too often to need special recognition here, and this exhibition only attests anew the etcher’s place and technical ability.\(^{131}\)

Unbeknownst to the reviewer, the artist had already given up etching, executing her last known plate in 1888.\(^{132}\)

Although she ceased printmaking at the height of her career, Nimmo Moran continued to exhibit and publish her prints in the 1890s and maintained her membership at the New York Etching Club until 1893 and London’s Society of Painter-Etchers until 1894. I believe that her decision to abandon etching was – like her decision to pursue etching – based in part on practical concerns and commercial considerations. The medium’s declining popularity with artists and collectors made the production of new plates not only unfashionable, but also unprofitable.

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\(^{129}\) “Women Etchers at the League,” newspaper clipping, no source, no date (likely April 1888), B-181, Thomas Moran Biographical Archive, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.

\(^{130}\) *Southampton, Village and Pond with Cows* (figure 5.45) is the only etching I have located that was not included in Klackner’s exhibition.


\(^{132}\) Thomas Moran etched his last known original etching in 1889 and his last known reproductive etching in 1891. See cat nos. 72 and 75, respectively, in Anne Morand and Nancy Friese, *The Prints of Thomas Moran in the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art* (Tulsa: Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1986), 164-165 and 170-171.
Instead, she turned her creative efforts back to painting, perhaps with the aspiration of translating her widespread success as a printmaker into even greater celebrity as a painter.

**The Final Decade, 1890-1899**

The last major exhibition of Mary Nimmo Moran’s etchings held during the artist’s lifetime was at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She submitted twelve prints for display in the Fine Arts Department, including early works such as *Bridge Over the Bushkill* (figure 4.4) and *Bridge Over the Delaware* (figure 4.11), as well as the acclaimed *Twilight, Easthampton* (figure 5.13) and her recent Floridian scenes *Point Isabel, Florida* (figure 6.20) and *A Florida Forest* (figure 6.21). The exhibition also included two impressions of *Summer, Easthampton* (figure 5.14) – one submitted by the artist for display in the Fine Arts Department, the other lent by art dealer Frederick Keppel for display in the Woman’s Building.

Keppel also lent an impression of *The Goose Pond, Easthampton* (figure 5.18), which hung in the Woman’s Building amidst a display of 138 etchings, engravings, wood engravings, and lithographs executed by European and American women artists over the course of three centuries. In the catalogue accompanying the Woman’s Building, an unnamed author noted that, “in America not only have women established their right to an equal hearing with their male co-workers in the graphic arts, but in etching they can lay claim to at least three whose rank is of

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133 While the World’s Columbian Exposition was open in Chicago, the Print Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, organized an exhibition of American engravings and etchings instead of its usual summer exhibition of new acquisitions. This was done, according to the catalogue, “in the belief that the many European visitors who may be expected this year, will find it more interesting to see the work of the artists of the United States than that of the masters, old and modern, of Europe, which they are already familiar.” The exhibition included twelve etchings by Nimmo Moran, yet the catalogue does not list the titles of the prints displayed. Cat. nos. 373-384 in *Museum of Fine Arts. Print Department. Exhibition of American Engravings and Etchings, June to October, 1893*, ed. S.R. Koehler (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1893), 5.

134 For the complete list of Nimmo Moran’s etchings displayed in the Fine Arts Department at the World’s Columbian Exposition, see cat. nos. 1457-1468 in *World’s Columbian Exposition, Official Catalogue, Part X, Department K, Fine Arts* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1893), 34-35.

The author undoubtedly had Nimmo Moran in mind, perhaps along with Cassatt and Edith Loring Pierce Getchell, whose prints also hung in the Woman’s Building. The twelve etchings that Nimmo Moran displayed in the Fine Arts Department earned her a medal and a diploma awarded by judge Emily Sartain. Sartain, who was then principal of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, served as chair of the committee tasked with decorating the women’s rooms in the Pennsylvania Building and she was the first woman selected by the Bureau of Awards to judge the Fine Arts Department. An advocate, supporter, and educator of women in the arts, Sartain used “her growing authority and prestige as principal to advance women’s status,” Swinth writes. “She served as a prominent spokeswoman in settings like the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 and frequently promoted individual women artists, both old friends and students.”

There is no surviving correspondence between Sartain and Nimmo Moran, yet the two women were certainly aware of each other’s work and may have been friends. Thomas Moran shared a studio with Samuel Sartain, Emily’s brother, in Philadelphia, where their father John Sartain first demonstrated the etching process for Moran in 1860. Furthermore, Peter Moran and wife Emily Kelley Moran lived in Philadelphia and were, along with the Sartains, prominent figures in the city’s art community. It was a bold move for Emily Sartain to award Mary Nimmo Moran a medal and a diploma, yet the recognition was well deserved. Despite Nimmo

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136 World’s Columbian Exposition, Official Catalogue, Part XIV, Woman’s Building, 57.
137 In 1937, Ruth Moran gifted Mary Nimmo Moran’s Diploma from the World’s Columbian Exposition, as well as her Diploma from the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers, London, to the New York Public Library. Both are currently in the collection of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs.
140 On the friendships and working relationships of the Sartain and Moran families, see Helena E. Wright, “Prints in the Sartains’ Circle,” in Philadelphia’s Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy, 32-35.
Moran’s success and popularity, she had been passed over for awards in the past.¹⁴¹ Sartain was now in a position of power – one that she recognized could be used to promote women’s work – and she bestowed on Nimmo Moran the official approval her etchings merited.

By 1894, Nimmo Moran had returned to oil painting, focusing again on East Hampton’s landscape. Two years later, she publicly exhibited her first painting in fifteen years: titled *Spring Blossoms*, the work was displayed in the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, where it was listed for sale at $175.¹⁴² Two of her paintings from the 1890s are extant and either one may correspond to *Spring Blossoms*. The first work titled *The Garden Path, Easthampton* (1894, figure 6.27) depicts the sun-speckled walkway lining the south side of the Morans’ home-studio. The scene is framed on the left by the Queen Anne style sash windows of the studio’s turret and on the right by the blossoming flowers and lush vegetation of the artist’s garden.

Placing her easel in her backyard, she painted this oil on panel painting *en plein air*. Daughter Ruth Moran described her mother painting “the old trees of East Hampton that she loved so much,” one of which arcs over the garden path to create a natural archway in the composition.¹⁴³ Her careful rendering of sunlight and shadows, as well as the textural varieties and vibrant colors of the surrounding greenery and flowering buds, reveals not only her devotion to nature and *plein-air* study, but also the influence of Impressionist aesthetics upon American landscape painting in the 1890s.

While the interior of the Morans’ studio served as a workshop, meeting space, and informal gallery for the display of fine art, the exterior gardens played an equally important role

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¹⁴¹ In 1886, Mary Nimmo Moran was one of two finalists in a competition for best original etching of an American subject sponsored by the Rembrandt Club of Brooklyn. The prize of $600 was ultimately awarded to the other finalist, Thomas Moran. *The Critic* reported that, “the judges were evenly divided at first, but finally decided for the husband.” “The Lounger,” *The Critic* 10, no. 164 (February 19, 1887): 92.


in the overall artful atmosphere of the home-studio. The grounds inspired several painted and etched works by Moran, Nimmo Moran, and their contemporaries in East Hampton, including Theodore Wores, who painted a view of the couple’s home and garden in 1898/1899 (figure 6.28). In addition to her career as a professional artist, Nimmo Moran avidly gardened – a middle-class leisure pursuit popularized in the 1890s by the American garden movement. An obituary notice later noted that, “Mrs. Moran had a finely cultivated intellect and a wide range of interests, including intimate knowledge of trees and flowers and practical work among them.”

She was photographed in her East Hampton garden in 1884 (figure 6.28), where she stands among the chrysanthemums later featured in *The Garden Path*.

Art historian Virginia Grace Tuttle argues that, “in the wake of the industrial revolution, a passion for domestic flower gardening swept through America’s middle class…The gardeners smitten by this horticultural contagion proudly designed, planted, and maintained their own gardens. Their gardens were their works of art, cherished bits of paradise that signified lives well lived and hearts in the right place.” At the same time, American artists – many of whom, like Nimmo Moran, were avid gardeners themselves – discovered the garden as a worthy subject for art. Inspired by French Impressionist painters, notably Claude Monet who famously painted his garden in Giverny, American artists turned to their private gardens for pictorial inspiration. Yet, as Tuttle argues, “they were not only portraying the physical properties of those cultivated spaces, they were [also] picturing ideas popularly associated with gardens at the time.”

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145 “Moran, Mary Nimmo,” newspaper clipping [obituary], source unknown, 1899, A 59, Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library, Long Island Collection.
147 Ibid.
The domestic garden was believed to be a space for retreat – one that offered working and middle-class urbanites a quiet, restful place to escape modern-industrial life. Influenced by England’s Arts and Crafts movement, American gardeners aimed to create refined and peaceful spaces, designed to encourage people to spend more time in nature. These gardens were, according to Tuttle, “enclaves of peace and contentment, places in which gardeners could escape the vexations of the new urban-industrial life that threatened to consume them…In an age of all-too-rapid change, old-fashioned and wild gardens connected Americans with a national identity founded on a nostalgic ideal of the simple life of earlier times when the natural environment had been instrumental in forming the American character.”\textsuperscript{148}

As a gardener herself, Nimmo Moran was certainly aware of such associations, which were written about extensively in popular magazines and fine art periodicals.\textsuperscript{149} Moreover, as a nostalgic emblem of a simpler time, the garden was a subject that appealed to Nimmo Moran’s preference for the pre-industrial American landscape. As in her etched imagery of East Hampton, her painted garden scenes offered audiences an escape from the challenges of their urban existence. Tuttle argues that when an artist “painted a portrait of a garden they were not merely recording its appearance. Gardens, they knew, were much more than the sum of their material parts. The American impressionists gave pictorial expression to the dream of a healthy, harmonious, American life at the dawn of the Progressive era.”\textsuperscript{150}

From a thematic standpoint, Nimmo Moran’s \textit{The Garden Path} is tied to her earlier etched impressions of East Hampton’s landscape, in which she preserved and idealized the nation’s rural, pastoral past. Stylistically, her paintings from the 1890s reflect a shift in her

\textsuperscript{148} Tuttle, 38.
\textsuperscript{149} In addition to her writings on art, critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer published extensively on landscaping and gardening. For a detailed review of her critical writings on the garden, see Judith K. Major, \textit{Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer: A Landscape Critic in the Gilded Age} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).
\textsuperscript{150} Tuttle, 38.
aesthetic, as she adopted a vibrant color palette and feathery brushstroke that reflect the influence of the Impressionist – rather than the Tonalist – landscape. A year after painting *The Garden Path*, she executed a companion piece titled *In Dr. Edward Osborn’s Garden* (figure 6.30). The work depicts the flower garden of neighbors Dr. Edward and Phoebe Osborn, from whom the Morans purchased the plot of land upon which they built their home-studio in 1884. A wooden picket fence divided the Moran’s property from the Osborn’s: Nimmo Moran planted a flower border on the north side of the fence – seen on the right side of *The Garden Path* – and Dr. Edward Osborn planted a flower border on the south side. The two bonded over their mutual love of gardening and, as a result, “the Osborn garden and the Moran garden practically functioned as one.”

*In Dr. Edward Osborn’s Garden* provides a glimpse into the lush, verdant garden adjoining the Morans’ property, where Nimmo Moran often painted and etched. As in *The Garden Path*, she adopted a light color palette, adding thick daubs of red, yellow, white, orange, and purple paint to capture the rich floral variety of the season. She also paid close attention to the effects of sunlight on the landscape, painting the foreground grass in various shades of green and creating colored shadows on the weathered shingles of the Osborns’ home. She dissolved the distant trees, bushes, and flowers in loose, feathery brushwork, enveloping the scene in an atmospheric haze of muted blue, green, and purple paint.

Nimmo Moran would have been exposed to Impressionist painting through publications and exhibitions held in New York City, where she and Thomas Moran maintained a winter studio until her death. Moreover in 1891, leading American Impressionist painter William Merritt Chase founded the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art in Southampton, Long

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Island, where he taught every summer until 1902. While in Southampton, Chase painted some of his most celebrated Impressionist canvases, including *At the Seaside* (ca. 1892, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and *The Bayberry Bush* (ca. 1895, Parrish Art Museum, Watermill, New York). Chase and Nimmo Moran shared at least one student, a female painter and printmaker by the name of Zella de Milhau (American, 1870-1954). It has heretofore been assumed that De Milhau moved to Southampton to study painting with Chase. Yet in 1890, one year before Chase opened the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art, De Milhau executed an etching after Nimmo Moran’s *The Passaic Meadows* (figure 6.31), an indication that she had studied with the artist prior to Chase’s arrival.

Nimmo Moran executed at least one additional oil painting in the 1890s: in a 1917 inventory of Thomas Moran’s studio, the artist recorded all of his wife’s works in his possession, including “*An Easthampton Apple Orchard* (Dr. Osborn’s) Size 20 x 30 Unfinished. Painted in the spring of 1899 & her last work.”\(^{152}\) This painting was likely executed in the Impressionist-inspired style she adopted in both *The Garden Path* and *In Dr. Edward Osborn’s Garden*. At the time of her death, *The East Hampton Star* described *An Easthampton Apple Orchard* as “a beautiful unfinished painting of an orchard in blossom…it is considered one of her greatest achievements…and is now the most prominent feature of ‘The Studio,’ where she spent so many happy summers.”\(^{153}\)

Unfortunately, the artist did not live to continue her pursuit of oil painting and we can only surmise about the direction her art may have taken in the early twentieth century. Given the Morans’ close ties to East Hampton and Nimmo Moran’s increasing interest in gardening and Impressionist aesthetics, she may have continued her pursuit of this subject and style in a manner

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\(^{152}\) Quoted in Hefner, *The Studio*, 21. I believe that Mary Nimmo Moran executed several other oil paintings during the 1890s, but I have not yet been able to locate additional examples.

\(^{153}\) “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).
similar to artists such as Childe Hassam. Hassam first visited East Hampton in 1898 and regularly painted the town’s historic homes and gardens, as seen in works such as *Old House and Garden, East Hampton* (1898, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle) and *The Water Garden* (1909, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).\(^{154}\)

Despite etching’s demise in the early 1890s, the medium was “revived” once again in the early twentieth century, adopted by artists as diverse as Childe Hassam and John Sloan – the former etching serene views of East Hampton’s Main Street (figure 6.32), the latter etching chaotic, often raunchy street scenes in New York City (figure 6.33). While artists such as Joseph Pennell, who had participated in the first wave of America’s etching “revival” in the 1880s, continued their work in the medium in the next century, Nimmo Moran’s life and oeuvre was cut short in 1899, when she was just fifty-seven years old.

On September 29, 1899, *The East Hampton Star* reported that the town,

…has sustained a sad and irreparable loss in the death of Mrs. Moran. Intimately associated with East Hampton scenes and East Hampton people for the past twenty years, in art, in society, and in her home life, Mrs. Moran has endeared herself to the hearts of all classes of our people.” The newspaper goes on to explain that, “after a severe illness, lasting only two weeks, having suffered greatly during that time, Mrs. Moran died at about half-past twelve o’clock, Monday morning, September 25th, 1899, at ‘The Studio,’ her East Hampton home.\(^{155}\)

The artist’s death certificate lists her cause of death as “enterocolitis,” although daughter Ruth Moran later described it as “enteric fever,” also known as typhoid fever, which she is believed to have “contracted from the American soldiers who had returned from Cuba and who were in camp at Montauk Point.”\(^{156}\)


\(^{155}\) “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 29, 1899).

One year prior to Nimmo Moran’s death, a military camp was erected in Montauk, where soldiers returning from the Spanish-American War were held in quarantine in an effort to prevent the spread of disease. In September 1898, *The Star* announced that “the Soldier’s Relief Corps of East Hampton has opened a hospital at the north end of the village for the care of sick soldiers from Montauk…The Relief Corps tent at the camp is doing a wonderfully good work, the ladies going to Montauk every day and ministering to the sick.” Later that month, the paper reported that among the women visiting the camp was “Mrs. Moran” who donated “sheep flannel bands.” In October, she and Ruth Moran were again acknowledged in *The Star* for providing soldiers with supplies, including custards, cocoa, and “other delicacies once a week.”

The Moran family spent the winter 1898 at their New York City residence, located at 37 West 22nd Street, returning to East Hampton in May 1899. The summer progressed as usual: on June 30th, the Morans hosted the first of six weekly Shakespearean readings held at the studio before “a cultured and appreciative audience.” One month later, the “fancy article booth” at the Village Fair displayed a selection of etchings by both Mary Nimmo Moran and Thomas Moran. However, by September, the family’s world was turned upside down. In a letter written to close friend Richard Watson Gilder on September 14, 1899, Thomas Moran explained:

Ruth’s attack of diphtheria [diphtheria] had just commenced when I saw you last at the meeting nearly a month ago, but she is now able to be about & will soon be entirely well. Last Monday afternoon Mary was found to have contracted the same disease in an even more violent form than Ruth had it…Up to today we had but small hope of her power to hold out against it, but today we have more hope of her. Her throat was worse than ever today but her consuming fever has gone down & Dr. Osorman who was here this evening says that although he cannot pronounce her on the road to recovery, yet she shows so much strength that we need not at all despair of her recovery. Will drop you a line as

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157 “East Hampton Relief Corps,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 9, 1898).
158 “East Hampton Relief Work,” *The East Hampton Star* (September 23, 1898).
160 On May 12, 1899, *The East Hampton Star* reported that, “Thomas Moran, the landscape painter, and Mrs. Moran arrived at their studio yesterday.” “Our Summer Visitors,” *The East Hampton Star* (May 12, 1899).
161 “Readings from Shakespeare,” *The East Hampton Star* (June 30, 1899).
soon as we can say anything definite…We are both pretty well worn out with watching during the last few weeks but can hold out as long as there is a shadow of hope of saving them. Thanking you for your kind inquiry. I am as ever yours, T.M.\textsuperscript{163}

This letter was written just eleven days before Nimmo Moran succumbed to the illness. Her funeral was held at St. Luke’s Chapel, now St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, located approximately a third of a mile from the Morans’ home-studio on Main Street. She was laid to rest at the South End Cemetery “opposite the old wind-mill that has so often been a feature in her paintings and etchings. She loved East Hampton and all that was associated with the village and often expressed her wish to be buried here, in the event of her death.”\textsuperscript{164} A monument to the Moran family marks the plot where Mary Nimmo Moran is buried (figure 6.34).\textsuperscript{165}

Thomas Moran was devastated by his wife’s death. Biographer Thurman Wilkins writes that, “Moran’s sense of loss at Mollie’s passing was overwhelming. His relationship with her had always been warm and close and strong…The bereavement plunged him into a numbed depression of spirit, from which he sought relief in travel.”\textsuperscript{166} Two weeks after her death, Moran left East Hampton and returned to New York City, moving from the home-studio he had shared with his wife at 37 West 22\textsuperscript{nd} Street to “Mrs. Stimpson’s Boarding House” at 84 Irving Place.\textsuperscript{167} The following spring, in the company of daughter Ruth Moran, he made what art historian Anne Morand has called “a voyage of consolation to the West.”\textsuperscript{168}

In her will, Mary Nimmo Moran left the East Hampton home-studio and its contents to Ruth Moran, who gave up her career as a professional Shakespearean reader to dedicate herself

\textsuperscript{163} Thomas Moran, letter to Richard Watson Gilder, September 14, 1899. Letters Received, Box 12, M. 20, Richard Watson Gilder Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.
\textsuperscript{164} “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” The East Hampton Star (September 29, 1899). The South End Cemetery is visible in the distance of Nimmo Moran’s The Goose Pond, Easthampton (figure 5.18).
\textsuperscript{165} Thomas Moran (d. 1926) was later buried next to his wife, as were their three children Paul Nimmo Moran (d. 1907), Ruth Bedford Moran (d. 1948), and Mary Scott Moran, later Mary Moran Tassin (d. 1955).
\textsuperscript{166} Wilkins, 286.
\textsuperscript{167} Anderson, 264.
\textsuperscript{168} Morand, Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 81.
to serving as her father’s business manager and travel companion. According to close friend Fritiof Fryxell, Ruth Moran “lived with no other thought than to take her mother’s place and try to do for Thomas Moran what Mary Nimmo Moran had done…Like her mother, she proved competent, assuming responsibility for their joint housekeeping, wherever that might be, and also for travel arrangements, exhibitions, picture sales and correspondence.” She also worked to ensure that her mother’s oeuvre and legacy would not be forgotten, donating impressions of her etchings to notable public collections, including the New York Public Library and the Smithsonian Institution, and organized the artist’s papers for deposit at the East Hampton Library.

*The Old Bridge Over Hook Pond, East Hampton, Long Island*

After Mary Nimmo Moran’s death, Thomas Moran immersed himself in his work, executing what Nancy Anderson describes as “an astonishing number of paintings” in the first decade of the twentieth century. He also traveled extensively throughout the western United States and abroad, returning to both Mexico and Great Britain before eventually settling in Santa Barbara, California, in 1916. However, he maintained his home-studio in East Hampton and spent his summers there whenever possible.

He continued to paint Long Island landscapes in the early twentieth century, including *The Old Bridge Over Hook Pond, East Hampton, Long Island* (figure 6.35). Executed in the summer 1907, this oil on canvas painting is a reinterpretation of Nimmo Moran’s 1883 etching…

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169 According to *The East Hampton Star*, Mary Nimmo Moran’s personal estate was valued at $1,500 and her property was valued at $1,800. Dr. Edward and Phoebe Osborn were named the executors of her will, which was dated March 20, 1898. “Mrs. Moran’s Will,” *The East Hampton Star* (December 22, 1899).
171 Anderson, 161.
172 On Thomas Moran’s life and travels between 1900 and his death 1926, see Ibid., 161-165, 264-279; Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches*, 81-92; and Wilkins, 286-314.
“‘Twixt the Gloamin’ and the Mirk, When the Kye Come Hame” (figure 5.26). As in the etching, the painting depicts East Hampton at twilight when the sun has set below the horizon illuminating the sky in a soft, atmospheric haze. Moran may have been working directly from Nimmo Moran’s print, yet he made alterations to the composition by elevating the perspective, distancing the horizon, and adding a small female figure on the old wooden bridge.

I believe Moran added this female figure in remembrance of his wife – a homage to an artist whose etchings and paintings visually defined East Hampton over the course of two decades. In many ways, The Old Bridge Over Hook Pond encapsulates her career and artistic vision, one that was intimately intertwined with the work of her husband and yet remarkably personal and original. This painting is the Morans’ final collaboration and reveals the continued influence of Nimmo Moran’s art even after her death.

In her obituary, The East Hampton Star affectionately described the artist as “modest and unassuming and free from affection and ostentation, as are all truly great and gifted natures…the world of art will never again be thrilled with her picturesque work; but as we have her paintings and etchings to remind us of her genius and talent so we have the sweet and happy memories of her home and of her sunny and placid nature to remind us of herself.” The Old Bridge Over Hook Pond is Moran’s memory of his wife, an embodiment of her devotion to nature, plein-air study, and the Tonalist aesthetic. Moran strategically used light, tone, and a muted color palette to convey his (or perhaps more accurately her) personal impressions of nature, nostalgically preserving East Hampton’s past, as well as his own, when he and Mary Nimmo Moran used to draw, etch, and paint the American landscape together.

173 Moran may have printed examples of this etching after his wife’s death, as there are four impressions held by the Gilcrease Museum inscribed “M. Nimmo Moran / Signed by T. Moran.” In total, I have located approximately 100 impressions that Moran signed on behalf of his wife. Since Nimmo Moran died unexpectedly, he may have printed and signed these impressions for exhibition or publication prior to cancelling her plates.

174 “Mrs. Thomas Moran,” East Hampton Star (September 29, 1899).
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