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Louisville June 1. 1843.

W.C. Allan

the painter

William C. Allan

KENTUCKY  
ANTE-BELLUM  
PORTRAITURE

By  
*Edna Talbott Whitley*  
(Mrs. Wade Hampton Whitley)



*Illustrated by photographs from the collection of*  
THE NATIONAL SOCIETY of  
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'42, '47, '49, '51. He exhibited at the N.A.D. from 1829 to 1851, at the Penn. Academy in 1831, and at the American Academy in '38, '39, '40. He came to Frankfort, Ky., where he advertised Sept. 5, 1843, was in West Virginia 1850, 1856, and in Fayette and Harrison Counties, Ky., 1867-1870. In popularity he was a rival of Chester Harding.

LEVI ALKIN, born in France c. 1817, was probably a teacher in the school conducted by another Frenchman, Wm. Broda, who had lived in Pa., N. Y., and Ohio before settling at Newport, Campbell Co., 1850.

THOMAS ALLEN, Louisville portrait painter, had a studio on the east side of 4th St. between Main and Market in 1843/4. (Directory)

✓ WILLIAM C. ALLEN was paid \$250 by the state for a fanciful picture of *Daniel Boone* in 1838. It was hung at the Capitol Building the next year. In 1841 he was one of four Louisville artists invited to exhibit work in Cincinnati, his entries being portraits of *Dr. (Charles) Caldwell*, *Rev. Mr. Humphrey* and one listed as *Gentleman*. His Louisville studios were on 4th between Main and Market in 1844, at 517 Market in 1848, and the next year on 7th between Chestnut and Broadway. Shortly before his death he worked at New Orleans where he painted *Zachary Taylor*, 6'4" x 4'6", for the Robt. Q. Ward family, now at the Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort.

WILLIAM CHILTON ALLAN, 1825-1844, a son of Hon. Chilton Allan of Clark Co., was a pupil of the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts in 1839, exhibiting work at Mechanic's Institute, and in 1844 displayed a sculptured bust of Henry Clay in the Ky. State Library. At the time of his death he was pronounced "one of the most promising sculptors this country has ever produced". Because of the similarity of name some of the work of the two artists may be confused in the above account.

☆ JACQUES AMANS, 1801-1888, who was born and died at Paris, France, worked in New Orleans, 1828 to 1856, from a Royal St. studio. Washington and Lee University has his portrait of *Zachary Taylor*, dated 1831, Monterey, Mexico.

ELIPHALET FRAZER ANDREWS, 1835-1915, born at Steubenville, Ohio, to Alexander Hull and Elizabeth Ann Frazer Andrews, graduated at Marietta College in 1853 and went abroad in 1855 to study under Ludwig Knaus at Dusseldorf, and Bonnat at Paris. He founded the Corcoran School of Art at

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all abundant at the Falls. Audubon painted a graceful swallow in flight, and he estimated that nine thousand such birds roosted in the dense sycamore forests near Louisville. Although he initially sketched for pleasure, his 1810 encounter with visiting artist-naturalist Alexander Wilson (1766–1813) caused him to realize that his love of ornithology could have a broader purpose. This idea culminated in the 1838 publication of his magnum opus, *The Birds of America*, which contains 435 engravings portraying a total of 1,065 birds. The scientific and encyclopedic scope of Audubon's project—conceived at the Falls of the Ohio—seems to be an American outgrowth of the Age of Enlightenment as well as the genesis of Louisville painting.

Audubon turned to portraiture to earn a living because portraits were in great demand. Before the introduction of the daguerreotype in the 1840s, portraiture was the only means of recording a likeness. A portrait could connote one's social standing, and more important, portraiture gave people a sense of permanence during an era when sudden illnesses often cut people's lives short.

Famous portraitists coming to Louisville during the city's early years included New York's leading painter, John Wesley Jarvis (1780–1840). In November 1820 Jarvis portrayed Lucy and WILLIAM CROGHAN at their family estate, Locust Grove, where their engrossing portraits remain. Chester Harding (1792–1866), a prominent Boston artist, made frequent visits to depict Louisville citizens during the 1830s and 1840s. Another periodic guest was George Peter Alexander Healy (1813–94), an internationally famous portraitist who had exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, and the Paris Salon. Healy's 1864 *Portrait of the Speed Family* (Filson Club) conveys the character and humanity of his subjects.

Joseph H. Bush (1794–1865), born in Frankfort, Kentucky, was perhaps Louisville's foremost resident painter during the antebellum period. His early talent had been recognized by Henry Clay, who financed Bush's study with noted artist Thomas Sully in Philadelphia between 1814 and 1817. Afterward Bush settled permanently in Louisville—although he, like all early portrait painters, traveled frequently to seek commissions.

Bush's career spanned five decades, and his style evolved brilliantly, meeting the changing tastes of the day. Bush's early style is evident in his portrait of Gen. WILLIAM CLARK, about 1817, who was coleader of the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific coast (Filson Club). Bush establishes a bond between subject and viewer through his masterful rendering of the human face. He used a hard linear technique, characteristic of his early style, to convey the general's uniform; he also tended to stylize features, such as the uniform's epaulets.

By the mid-1830s Bush began to inject romantic elements into such portraits as *General*

*Zachary Taylor*, 1848 (White House). Taylor stands in three-quarter view with a dramatic sunset background—an aged, victorious military hero near the end of his career. In a style typical of his later works, Bush used strong contrast between light and dark colors, emphasized shading, and employed much freer brushstrokes.

Bush's friend Samuel Woodson Price (1828–1918) first studied with Louisville portrait painter William Reading and later with the well-known Lexington painter Oliver Frazer. From 1851 to 1859, Price had a flourishing portrait studio in Louisville. He was highly complimented by former president Millard Fillmore after Price completed Fillmore's portrait in New York in 1856 (Filson Club). Price's heroic life-scale portrait depicted Fillmore during his unsuccessful run for the presidency as the American Party candidate.

Today Price is especially remembered for his book, *Old Masters of the Bluegrass*, published in 1902. Price was blind when he dictated the work, and Filson Club president R.T. Durrett wrote of him in the book's preface, "In thus groping his way through eternal darkness, he rescued his fellow-artists from oblivion." Price knew the artists personally—including Louis Morgan (1814–52), who painted portraits in Louisville in the winter of 1838 or 1839, and MATTHEW HARRIS JOUETT (1788–1827), the Lexington artist who portrayed many distinguished Louisvillians in his short, prolific career.

James Reid Lambdin (1807–89)—like Bush, a student of Thomas Sully—maintained a studio in Louisville from 1832 until 1838. John Peter Frankenstein (1817–81) worked as both portrait painter and sculptor during visits to the city in 1839, 1847, and 1851. William C. Allen opened his studio in Louisville during the 1840s after having established his reputation with the impressive *Daniel Boone*, 1838 (KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY). Allen's romantic image of Boone—commissioned by the Kentucky legislature for \$250—graced the then-new capitol in Frankfort. Notable antebellum Louisville portraitists also included Clement Reeves Edwards (1820–98) and THOMAS CAMPBELL (1790–1858). Campbell portrayed Abigail and Samuel Churchill in an attractive pair of portraits for their Spring Grove home in Jefferson County (Filson Club).

Although portraiture dominated antebellum painting, interesting activity also occurred in genre art (genre consists of subjects taken from everyday life). Robert Brammer (1811–53) was listed in the 1838–39 Louisville city directory as an artist "of oil paintings and views in the United States." By 1840 Brammer was a partner with German-born Augustus Von Smith (ca. 1811–53), and together they painted the *Oakland House and Race Course*, 1840 (SPEED ART MUSEUM). In that painting, Brammer and Von Smith convey race-day excitement as prosperous Louisvillians on horseback and in carriages

approach the track east of Seventh Street Rd. in the area of later Magnolia and Hill Streets.

Whereas *Oakland House* captures the city's love affair with HORSE RACING, competition of another kind—politics—was the subject of an influential work brought to Louisville by America's foremost genre artist, George Caleb Bingham (1811–79). Bingham exhibited his *County Election* for two months in 1853 at Hegan's Picture Store on MAIN St. The *Louisville Daily Times* on April 6, 1853, urged the public, "If you wish to enjoy the most delightful treat you have had for years, go take a look."

In addition to genre, landscape became an increasingly popular subject as the century progressed. Many early visitors to Louisville marveled at the beauty of the sycamore trees that majestically rose along the river's edge. In 1828 writer and artist Capt. Basil Hall (1788–1844) drew a sycamore near Louisville, noting on his sketch that the tree measured "35 feet in circumference at 5 feet from the ground." Hall made additional sketches (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington) showing sycamore groves and a panoramic view of the Ohio at SHIPPINGPORT for his 1829 publication, *Travels in North America*.

John Banvard (1815–91) began working in Louisville as a portrait painter in 1830, but between 1841 and 1846 he created his grandiose riverscape, *Panorama of the Mississippi* (destroyed). River travel was Louisville's main mode of transportation prior to its first rail connection in 1851. Louisvillians could easily identify with the vicarious river journey Banvard offered them, and people crowded into the Apollo Rooms to watch performances of the painting fifty years before THOMAS EDISON treated Louisville to the first screen projector. Billed as the largest painting in the world, Banvard's four-foot-high masterwork was three miles in length! Viewers might have felt they were aboard a steamboat as the gigantic painting—attached to two upright revolving cylinders—displayed changing river scenes along the journey. After the Louisville debut, Banvard traveled to New York City with his *Panorama* and then to Europe, where his cinematic painting attracted thousands.

Banvard expressed the essence of the city's riverside in his *Panorama*, while other landscapists portrayed the unique character of Kentucky's land. Joseph Rusling Meeker (1827–89) studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City before his arrival in Louisville in 1852. Meeker created landscapes that evoked an Eden of rolling hills and fields. Alexander Helwig Wyant (1836–92), a landscape painter of national prominence, began his career in Frankfort in 1854. Wyant's style was strongly influenced by the Hudson River landscapist George Inness, whom he met in 1858. For a time Wyant operated from his Louisville studio on Main St. between Third and FOURTH Streets, over Hegan's Picture Store. Wyant's impressive *Falls of the Ohio and Louisville*, 1863,