

**NJS Presents*****Museums, Archives, Artifacts, and Documents*****In This Issue:*****William S. Bucklin and George P. Bartle:******Accomplished Artists of Phalanx, New Jersey*****By Joseph W. Hammond****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v7i2.256>**

*This narrative describes the lives and artistic careers of William Savery Bucklin (1851–1928) and George Parker Bartle (1853–1918), both of Phalanx, a hamlet in Colts Neck, Monmouth County, New Jersey. Three of the works illustrated come from the art collection of the Monmouth County Park System. They acquired them because the paintings depict woodland scenes on the opposite side of the Swimming River Reservoir from their Thompson Park campus, the back areas of which still retain this wooded character.*

Of the many artists who found inspiration in the landscapes and seashore stretches of Monmouth County, New Jersey, two individuals who were related by marriage stand out. They are William Savery Bucklin and George Parker Bartle. Both resided in the small farming community of Phalanx, in the northeast corner of Colts Neck Township. And both have left behind substantial artistic legacies, one as a traditional landscape painter in several media, and the other as a leading wood engraver who late in life engaged in landscape painting. This essay tells their stories.

William Savery Bucklin was one of the most accomplished and prolific artists working in Monmouth County in his day. Born in October of 1851 at the North American Phalanx in Colts Neck, he was a son of John Charles Bucklin (1807–1895) and Lydia Eliza Sears (1811–1902), prominent members of that utopian community, founded in 1843 and based on the social theories

of Charles Fourier. Upon dissolution of the Phalanx in 1856, John Bucklin acquired much of its rich farming acreage plus the commercial canning operation that he had helped to develop. The Bucklin family then made its home for roughly 80 years in the former Phalanstery building, a large, rambling three-story structure containing at one point about 85 rooms. The North American Phalanx attracted many visiting artistic and literary persons to its community while in operation. That tradition continued under Bucklin's ownership, where guests and extended family came and went with considerable regularity, often staying for long periods of time.



**The Phalanstery building at Colts Neck, circa 1890, when serving as a residence for the Bucklin family and others. The three-story section once housed many of the community functions, including a multipurpose ballroom that also served as a dining room and lecture hall, while the two-story wing in the foreground contained individual apartments. Built in 1847, the remains of the by-then-derelict structure were destroyed by fire on November 15, 1972. Courtesy Colts Neck Township, New Jersey, website.**

Will Bucklin (as he was known) began his art career at a very young age.

While still a little boy his interest in painting caught the attention of George Arnold who was something of an artist as well as a poet and it was he who gave "Billy Bucklin" his first art lessons. At the age of eleven the artist sold his first sketch to the poet, Edmund Clarence Stedman. After studying at the [Massachusetts] Normal Art school in Boston, Bucklin came to New York where he studied under Frederick Rondel [Sr.] and became one

of the first members of the Art Students' League. He later joined the Greenwich [CT] society [of Artists] and the Professional league of New York.<sup>1</sup>

Like many of his contemporary artists, Bucklin exhibited his work widely in such prestigious institutions as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1880–1881), the Brooklyn Art Association (1883–1885), the Boston Art Club (1883–1906), the National Academy of Design (1890), the Art Institute of Chicago (1891–1916), and the Society of Independent Artists (1917).<sup>2</sup> Landscape and genre views constituted the bulk of Bucklin's prodigious output. He greatly favored depicting the woodlands, streams, and rural byways of Monmouth County, especially those around the former North American Phalanx property in Colts Neck, where he lived. The artist also gave titles to many of his works, which were executed in pencil, watercolor, watercolor and gouache, and oil on canvas. Many of the early efforts were done on poor grades of newsprint, paper, or cardboard, causing conservation challenges today. Later in life, Bucklin mastered a fully developed Impressionistic style, no doubt fostered by his membership in the Greenwich Society of Artists, as many of its members promoted Impressionism.

Bucklin's nephew Alexander Woolcott, a highly popular and flamboyant drama critic, essayist, playwright, editor, actor, raconteur, and radio personality, summed up his uncle's artistic endeavors succinctly. "Uncle William had been, in his time, dowered with a combination of artistic temperament and wanderlust. He strolled happily across the map, painting desert expanses, California ranges, and Florida waterfront; but his inner eye was haunted by the mild verdure of his

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<sup>1</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 13 October 1949. George G. Arnold (1834–1865) spent part of his youth at the North American Phalanx. He first attempted a career as a portrait painter before turning his attention to poetry and literature. His father, George B. Arnold, had served as president of the Phalanx corporation. After the socialist community dissolved, the family remained in Monmouth County, where young George died at the age of 31.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hastings Falk, ed., *Who Was Who in American Art, 1564–1975* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1999), v. 1, 493.

home, and somewhere in every picture, through cactus, cypress, or palm, the tall beeches of Jersey pricked up into the alien sky.”<sup>3</sup>



***Snowfall in the Meadow*, signed and dated lower right *W. S. Bucklin '92*, oil on canvas, 25 by 48 inches. Courtesy Emperor's Treasures, New York, New York. This exceptional large work dates from 1892 and demonstrates that Bucklin had by then developed a mature painting style. It depicts a boggy meadow along the eastern border of the former Phalanx property, an area now covered by the Swimming River Reservoir. The painting has since been acquired by the Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, New Jersey.**

Bucklin's works were occasionally featured between 1912 and 1930 at the Dudensing Galleries in New York City. An art critic for the *New York Tribune* wrote a review of one such exhibit held there in 1919:

The exhibition of paintings and watercolors by W. S. Bucklin at the Dudensing Galleries is well worth a visit. Mr. Bucklin, now in his seventies, has specialized in tree painting. Nature lovers and woodsmen, looking at his work, can immediately recognize the kind of trees portrayed. His canvases possess, to a delightful degree, the quality of sunniness; his tender, virile, winey foliage (as the season may be), even the boles and twigs of his trees, convey the thought of sun and nutriment perfectly assimilated; there is charming individuality all the way through[—]in his elms, and oaks and birches, his willows and evergreens. The little forest brooks and pools he paints are remarkable for their translucence; his perspective is excellent and his sky is always the sky of the chosen season.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Hopkins Adams, *A. Woollcott: His Life and His World* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1945), 25.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Tribune*, 8 June 1919. Bucklin was actually 68 years old at the time.





Signed W. S. Bucklin in the lower right and inscribed *Pool in the North Woods*, circa 1910–1925, watercolor and gouache on art board, 21.25 by 28.25 inches. Courtesy Monmouth County Park System, Lincroft, New Jersey. A typical example of Bucklin’s numerous studies of woodland scenes in the area around the former North American Phalanx property.

In addition to his success as an accomplished artist, Bucklin assisted his father in the operation of the commercial canning business. One of their principal products was tomatoes put up in tin cans. His brother Charles held many patents for the cans as well as for the machinery used to pack them. About 1886, Will Bucklin joined his father in forming a firm named J. & W. S. Bucklin. Following the senior Bucklin’s death in 1895, Will continued the business. One neighbor recalled years later that “Will was not interested in canning and wasn’t very good at it, but he was the only one left, so he ‘carried on.’” She said, ““He started out every morning in spotless white from head to foot but when he went home in the evening there was hardly a white spot anywhere

for he was tomatoes from one end to the other. But no matter how he looked or felt he was always friendly and jolly.’”<sup>5</sup>

Business acumen not being a particular strength of the artist, the cannery declined to the point where it went bankrupt in 1909. The end was hastened by a fire that entirely destroyed the plant.<sup>6</sup> It remained closed for about two years, after which it was revived under the leadership of Will’s brother Charles.<sup>7</sup> From that time on, William S. Bucklin and his wife, Anne M. Ashton (1861–1941), made their home in Riverside, Connecticut, a community located near the art-rich towns of Greenwich and Cos Cob. They had married on November 30, 1881, in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. She was a daughter of William K. Ashton (1832–1906) and Jennie A. Parks (1839–1904) of that city.<sup>8</sup> The Bucklins apparently traveled extensively, given that Will executed artworks in such widespread places as a salmon fishing river in the Canadian Maritimes, a boggy swamp in northern Florida, and a ranch road in Santa Barbara, California. The couple, however, returned often to the farm at Phalanx, especially during the summer months, when Will set up a studio and salesroom in the Phalanstery.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mary B. Sim, *Commercial Canning in New Jersey: History and Development* (Trenton: New Jersey Agricultural Society, 1951), 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 12 May 1909.

<sup>7</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 5 April 1911.

<sup>8</sup> Marriages Registered in the City of Fitchburg. Available through Ancestry.com. (Retrieved 17 March 2021)

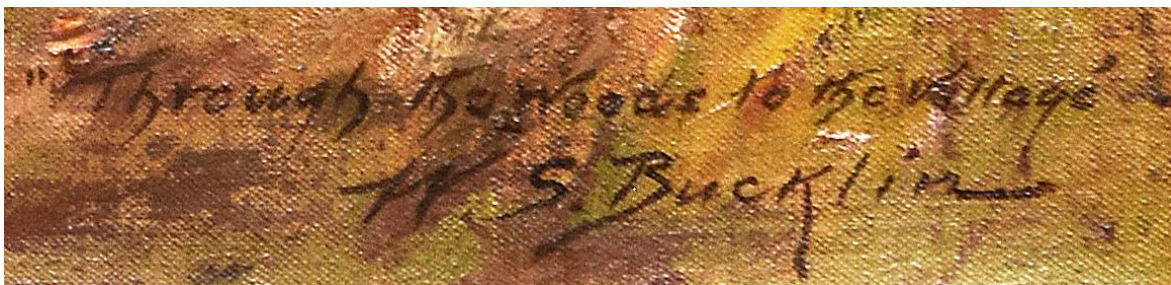
<sup>9</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 22 June 1927 and 4 July 1928.





Signed W. S. Bucklin in the lower right, and inscribed *Through the Woods to the Village*, circa 1910–1925, oil on canvas, 17.25 by 38.25 inches. Courtesy Monmouth County Park System, Lincroft, New Jersey. The village mentioned in the title refers to Lincroft, a crossroads community not far from the Bucklin residence.

William Savery Bucklin died on May 3, 1928, at the age of 77. His obituary, which appeared in the *Asbury Park Press* the following day, stated that he “died of a complication of diseases last evening at the Bucklin homestead, after a long illness. He returned to the Phalanx about a year ago to recuperate his health . . . Private funeral services will be held from the homestead tomorrow afternoon at 4, with Rev. Robert MacKellar of the Episcopal church here [meaning Red Bank] officiating. The body will be taken to the Rose Hill crematory at Linden Sunday for cremation under the direction of Funeral Director [R. R.] Mount and son [sic] of this place.”<sup>10</sup>



An example of Bucklin’s typical signature and title inscription. Courtesy Monmouth County Park System, Lincroft, New Jersey.

<sup>10</sup> *Asbury Park Press*, 4 May 1928.

Further information about Will Bucklin's death was provided in a letter dated June 1928 written by his nephew, Alexander Woollcott. In reminiscing about the family, Woollcott commented that "The last to go was Uncle Will. He had been born there [at the Phalanx] and did his first toddling in that pretty ravine of which he painted the beech trees all his days. Even when he had to go into exile as an old man and was supposed to be painting landscapes in Florida and California, it was the beeches that kept showing up in those pictures of his. Aunt Anne took his ashes down into the ravine and buried them at the roots of one of those trees. Then she carved his initials in the bark of the trunk. That was only a month ago."<sup>11</sup> All of the old-growth beech trees in the ravine along Phalanx Road in front of the former Bucklin residence are now gone. But their descendants continue to flourish there to this day, a fitting memorial to the creative artist who so capably depicted those trees in such a large percentage of his artistic endeavors.<sup>12</sup>

Artist George Parker Bartle was born in August of 1853 in Washington, DC, a son of George Bartle (1814–1899) and Miranda Ellis (1830–1907). His father worked as a United States government clerk, and the family enjoyed comfortable circumstances with a live-in Irish-born servant. Both parents were natives of the District of Columbia area.<sup>13</sup> Best known as a highly skilled wood engraver, Bartle studied in Washington with Henry Hobart Nichols Sr. (1816–1887), who had apprenticed in that trade to Benson J. Lossing (1813–1891), the Revolutionary War historian and publisher. Bartle became best known for his illustrations in *The Century Magazine*. From 1875 to 1880, he maintained a studio in the Corcoran Building in Washington. But in that

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<sup>11</sup> Beatrice Kaufman and Joseph Hennessey, eds., *The Letters of Alexander Woollcott* (New York: Viking Press, 1944), 82.

<sup>12</sup> Years later, local collectors recalled that Will Bucklin's niece, Mary W. Bucklin, ran an antiques shop in the former private apartment wing of the old Phalanstery building. One room contained many works by her uncle, lined up against the walls several frames deep. The remaining 80 acres and the Bucklin family residence were sold in 1943 to Laird & Co. of Colts Neck, who continued the canning operation for some years (*Red Bank Register*, 21 April 1943).

<sup>13</sup> U. S. Census of Population, 1860, Washington, DC, Ward 2, 98. Available through Ancestry.com. (Retrieved 13 November 2019)



last year, he removed to New York City, then soon after to the Phalanx community in Colts Neck, New Jersey. Bartle exhibited at the Brooklyn Art Association in 1875, and at the National Academy of Design in New York City in 1880.<sup>14</sup>



**[Soldier Aiding Wounded Comrade], George P. Bartle after William Gilbert Gaul, wood engraving on chine collé on white paper, 7 1/2 x 6 3/8 inches. John S. Phillips Collection. Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.**

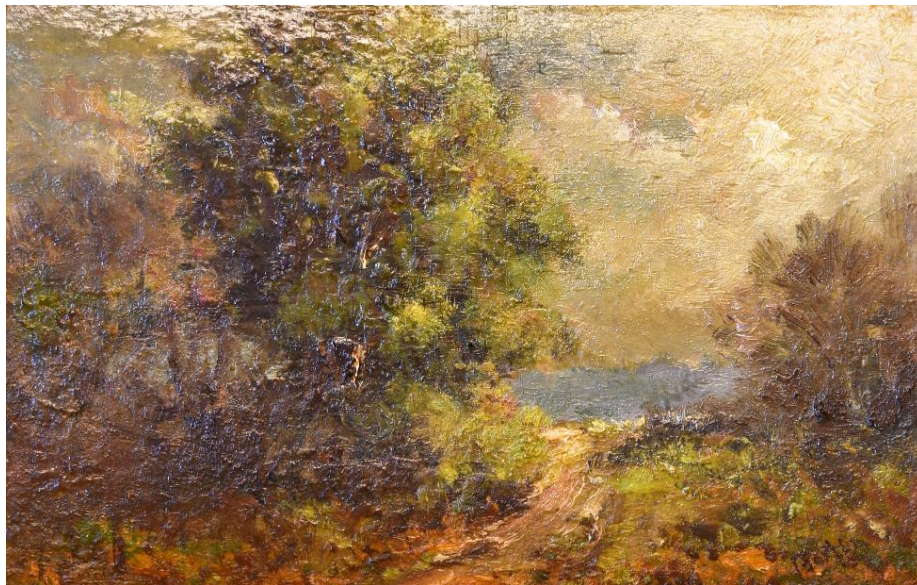
On November 12, 1884, George P. Bartle married Mary Bucklin Giles (1865–1926), a daughter of William T. Giles (1836–1900) and Julia Bucklin (1838–1924), who was an older sister of artist William Savery Bucklin. A newspaper account of the nuptials related that the couple was “united in marriage by the Rev. W. W. Case, of Holmdel, at the residence of the bride’s father. Miss Giles is very well known to the people of this neighborhood, and a number of friends of both bride and groom were present at the ceremony. The bride was dressed in dark blue satin. The

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Hastings Falk, *Op. Cit.*, v. 1, 222.

young couple received many tokens of affection and regard from their friends. A fine wedding repast was spread, to which the guests were invited after the ceremony.”<sup>15</sup>

The Bartles resided for most of their married life at the former North American Phalanx community with the Bucklins.<sup>16</sup> George continued his work as an engraver, but also engaged in landscape painting, probably influenced by his wife’s uncle, as their artistic styles in depicting the woodlands and country roadways around the Phalanx area shared a general resemblance to each other. Far younger than his sister Julia, Will Bucklin was only two years older than Bartle, making them close contemporaries. In August of 1885, the Red Bank Art League sponsored an exhibit in conjunction with a fair held by the ladies of that community. A review of the display noted that “an engraved proof, almost as fine as an impression from a steel plate, was the work of Mr. Bartle.”<sup>17</sup>



**Signed *Bartle* in the lower right and *George P. Bartle* on the reverse, and titled *Road at Phalanx/#6* on the reverse, ca 1910, oil on wood panel, 5 by 8 inches. Courtesy Monmouth County Park System, Lincroft, New Jersey. A rare example of Bartle’s work in color late in life.**

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<sup>15</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 19 November 1884.

<sup>16</sup> The Bartles apparently lived, at least for a short time in about 1893, in the nearby village of Red Bank. See *Red Bank Register*, 22 March 1893.

<sup>17</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 26 August 1885.

On June 23, 1903, George Bartle received an appointment as a United States postmaster at Phalanx, Monmouth County, a position he held until November of 1911.<sup>18</sup> There had been a prior post office at that location from 1854 to 1858, which had closed. The new facility, at first set up in the rambling Bucklin residence, was later housed in a small structure on the north side of Phalanx Road, east of Richdale Avenue. In 1905, Bartle received federal compensation for the position amounting to \$205.61.<sup>19</sup> A photographic image of the dapperly dressed postmaster holding a pipe and standing on the front steps of the Phalanx post office appeared as a photo postcard issued about 1910.<sup>20</sup>

The *Red Bank Register* of December 11, 1918, carried George P. Bartle's obituary. He had died two days earlier. The obituary began with a headline that read "He Was at One Time One of the Foremost Wood Engravers." The text continued, "George P. Bartle died on Monday at the Phalanx, where he had made his home for more than 37 years. He was a wood engraver and was one of the great artists in that line before this kind of work was supplanted by process engraving. Of late years he had devoted his time to color work, in connection with postal duties. Mr. Bartle was 65 years old. He leaves a widow, Mrs. Mary G. Bartle, daughter of Mrs. Julia Giles; and two sisters and a brother who live at Washington, D. C., Mr. Bartle's native place." The private funeral was conducted by the Rev. Robert MacKellar, an Episcopal priest from nearby Red Bank. Interment took place in the Bucklin/Giles family plot at Fair View Cemetery in Middletown.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> U. S. Appointments of Postmasters, 1832–1971, New Jersey, Middlesex to Warren, 187. Available through Ancestry.com. (Retrieved 13 November 2019)

<sup>19</sup> U. S. Register of Civil, Military and Naval Service, 1863–1959, v. 2, 205. Available through Ancestry.com. (Retrieved 13 November 2019)

<sup>20</sup> The image has been published by Randall Gabrielan in *Images of America: Colts Neck* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Red Bank Register*, 11 December 1918.



**An image of George P. Bartle taken at the Phalanx post office, circa 1910, from a photo postcard. Courtesy Randall Gabrielan, Middletown, New Jersey.**

The artistic careers of Will Bucklin and George Bartle took very different paths. Both, however, achieved recognition for their respective talents, one as a traditional landscape painter working in an Impressionist style, and the other as a highly talented wood engraver whose work appeared frequently in one of the most popular periodicals of the day.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bucklin and Bartle were not the only artists to call Phalanx home. Charles D. Sauerwein (1839–1918) and his son Frank P. Sauerwein (1871–1910) also took up residence there for a time around 1900. Frank was known primarily as a Western realistic painter.



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