

Portrait of Place: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints of New Jersey, 1761–1898**Morven Museum & Garden****Assembled by Joseph Felcone****Exhibition Website: <https://www.morven.org/portrait-of-place>****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v7i2.258>**

Originally exhibited in 2013, *Portrait of Place: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints of New Jersey, 1761–1898* is now available to the public on the Morven Museum & Garden's website. The exhibit is broad both temporally and in scope, incorporating images generated for a variety of purposes and not at all limited by medium. The images selected for the exhibition are truly representative of nearly 140 years of New Jersey history from the Colonial period through the late nineteenth century. Notably, nearly all regions of New Jersey are represented in this exhibit, from the Palisades and Hoboken to Delaware, Red Bank, and Atlantic City. Joseph Felcone, the collector and lender of the graphic art in this exhibition, elaborates in his introduction that the primary motivation in his personal collecting is the acquisition of as many views as possible of New Jersey, even more so if they represent extant buildings, places, and historical events. The digital exhibition ranges from paintings and city plans to advertisements, trade cards, and lithographs that depict important architecture in a city or region.

The full exhibition includes a strong showing of both classically trained artists and untrained painters whose work is derivative of folk art that convey a distinctly Americana style. The variety of graphics depicting the same, or similar, locations also provides a more comprehensive view of specific locales and gives insight into how locals perceived their own environment. For example, Thomas Scott's *Tamany Fish House, on the Pea Shore*, dated from about 1852, is a magnificent lithograph depicting a popular fishing club on the Delaware. While the lithograph was widely regarded as a high-quality print for the era, both for its expertise and its subject matter, the other image of Tammany Fish House in this exhibition instead conveys a more

limited artistic style, painted by William Rank, who is unknown as an artist. One can deduce that Rank painted this building because he enjoyed it while visiting the establishment or was perhaps a local. While that provenance will likely remain unknown, it is delightful to see how presumed locals enjoyed and viewed a favored New Jersey hot spot in the mid-nineteenth century. Similar to Rank's depiction of Tammany Fish House, *Styles Farm 1860* is yet another wonderful perspective of a family farm in Burlington County, painted by one of the sons in the household, Charles Styles, who was only 14 when he painted this extraordinary work. It is truly delightful to see paintings produced by locals, family members, and unknown artists alongside traditional lithographs, serene watercolors, and oils—it is clear all views and perspectives are given equal standing in this exhibit.

The collection is also rich with advertisements in a variety of styles that marketed everything from Newark shops to new homes for sale in Watchung Heights. The detailed descriptions for *Crump's Central Park Ice Cream Garden* allows the viewer to see the dynamic, everyday life of mid-nineteenth-century Newark. Conversely, the lithograph depicting the Stevens Pleasure Railway in Hoboken emphasizes a much different perspective of everyday life in what was designed to be a retreat for New York City residents. Bird's-eye views of towns such as Hackensack and Paterson highlight economic and population growth. Juxtaposed against the bucolic farms and serene watercolor shore scenes, it paints a different picture of New Jersey as a burgeoning state full of economic growth and opportunity. Considering that the advertisements, the folk art scenes of homesteads, and the oil paintings of the Great Falls of Paterson and Schooley's Mountain are contemporaneous, it produces a much more complex vision of New Jersey truly only available through the array of images included in this exhibition.

While the breadth of the exhibition successfully conveys a comprehensive perspective of New Jersey between 1761 and 1898, the website itself provides little in the way of interaction and organization. When the viewer clicks on an image, a pop-up with a didactic label displays a greater detail of the graphic, along with context regarding location, artist, provenance, and historical events. However, little organization guides the viewer from one image to the next. *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is of course an iconic moment in New Jersey history, but how does this connect with the images of Hoboken's Pleasure Railway? Depicting the Great Falls of Paterson next to the bird's-eye view of Paterson potentially could have highlighted the burgeoning growth of the city as a force in the silk industry by the late nineteenth century while also emphasizing its proximity to and preservation of nature. The gristmills, mostly abandoned in several images in this exhibit, can be used to describe the shifts in technology and emphasize New Jersey's premier place within the nation's economy since the 1760s. Without this kind of context, the images are often unrelated and it falls entirely on the viewer to connect the dots.

Consequently, this limited interaction makes the feel of this exhibition more in line with a digitized collection rather than an interactive exhibit. Digital exhibitions are most effective when a narrative is clear and present, and while the images weave great tales individually—and some of them collectively—the opportunity to provide an overall narrative connected by distinct events, places, or time is missed. By integrating a narrative or even separating the digital exhibition into different sections, it would allow the viewer to understand the overall importance of the whole, rather than seek out specific histories on the images that appeal to them most. One way of potentially incorporating a cohesive element would be to portray a map of New Jersey with pinpoints showing a visual of where these images are located. This would also emphasize the diverse geography and environment, which are distinguishing elements of New Jersey.

Chronological tools could also help with organization, highlighting different eras of New Jersey over the 137-year period included in this exhibit. This would both convey the wonderful works of art and distinguish the exhibition as an interactive learning tool rather than a digitized collection.

Overall, this exhibit is a strong showing of New Jersey's heritage as a state rich with history, art, and economic growth. The temporal span, from the Colonial era through the late nineteenth century, allows viewers to see the true expansion of New Jersey and to appreciate the architecture still in our cities, and consider those that are now extant. The diverse perspectives, from esteemed lithographers to untrained painters, provide distinct insight into New Jersey culture throughout the nineteenth century. The exhibit is a wonderful tool for researchers, historians, and history lovers of all ages to appreciate the rich heritage and all New Jersey has to offer—from 1761 through the present day.

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