Stephen Parrish and Charles A. Platt
Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Views

3 May to 2 June, 1985

Dalhousie Art Gallery
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Foreword

The Dalhousie Art Gallery is pleased to exhibit this outstanding collection of drawings and etchings by two of the most prominent American etchers from the late 19th Century. Stephen Parrish and Charles Platt travelled up the eastern seaboard from Massachusetts during the summer of 1881, sketching coastal and interior landscape scenes along their way to Nova Scotia. During this trip Parrish completed a substantial number of preparatory sketches which were later used in a composite fashion to create etchings.

Both Parrish and Platt were intrigued by the scenic coastal areas of New Brunswick near the Bay of Fundy, small picturesque towns in Nova Scotia and the abundant farmlands of the Annapolis Valley. A second sketching trip completed the following summer by Parrish resulted in additional drawings and etchings from this region.

These works are on loan for the exhibition from the Special Collections Department at the Killam Library, Dalhousie University. They contribute a significant dimension to this institution’s current holdings of historical and topographical prints of Maritime Canada which date from the 1570’s. The acquisition of the Parrish/Platt collection was made possible through a grant from the Government of Canada under the terms of the Cultural Export and Import Act. It was acquired last year through the efforts of Dr. Gayle Garlock, the former Collections Librarian at the Dalhousie University Library from an American fine art print collector who had purchased a large collection of work by Stephen Parrish directly from the artist’s estate through his grandson Maxfield Parrish Jr. Of historical note is the fact that Stephen Parrish’s son, Maxfield Parrish, was also a very prominent artist best known for his illustrations contained in books and magazines during the early part of this century.

We are grateful for the time and careful thought Ms. Karen Smith, Head of Special Services at the Killam Library has devoted to the accompanying interpretive essay. This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of the staff of both the Dalhousie Art Gallery and Special Collections, Killam Library.

Mern O’Brien
Director
April, 1985

A Rich Harvest:
Stephen Parrish’s 1881 Sketching Trip to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia

"I expect to get far North this summer, possibly to the upper end of New Brunswick... I feel there is a rich harvest there for the artist..."[1]

The American painter etcher, Stephen Maxfield Parrish, was deeply interested in depicting and interpreting the complex relationship between water, sky, and land. In his search for the essence of the association, Parrish journeyed far afield from his native Philadelphia to the shores of the Hudson and Schoon Riveber in New York State and to the Atlantic coast at Cape Ann and Gloucester. Word of the "strange shore effects of the Bay of Fundy at low tide..."[2] drew him up to the Maritimes in the late summer of 1881. He was not disappointed as the harvest was indeed rich. The trip provided Parrish with material for eight paintings, and the eighteen etchings of his New Brunswick-Nova Scotia series are ranked among his finest.

Stephen Parrish, born July 9, 1846, was the second son of a successful Quaker merchant. Educated in Philadelphia private schools, Parrish displayed an aptitude for drawing at an early age. Upon completion of his formal education he embarked on a trip to Europe on his own in 1867, where he was exposed to the works of the great masters.[3] After his return Parrish entered the family business and married. He retained an avid interest in art and continued to paint. In 1877 he committed himself to painting full-time. The experience was only in part a commercial success, since by November 1879, Parrish had only sold seven of the thirty-three paintings he had completed.[4]

At the same time that Parrish was launching his painting career, the international etching movement which had flourished in England and France in the 1860’s had reached the American art community with the establishment of the New York Etching Club in 1877.[5] Etching is a form of reproduction whereby the design is etched onto the surface of a copper or zinc plate. The etched lines are then bitten into the plate by acid. After the etched plate is inked, paper is laid over the plate and the image is transferred to the paper under heavy pressure. The etching technique allows for freer movement in drawing than any other graphic process,[6] so the talented artist is able to use the etching process to present an original work of art. Successful painter-etchers used their artistic talent to produce the perceptive works of art known as original prints.

Motivated by the need to support his family and having read Etching and Etchers by the British art critic, P. G. Hamerton, Parrish decided to try etching. After one brief lesson from fellow Philadelphia painter etcher, Peter Moran, Parrish produced his first plate on November 28, 1879.[7] By the year’s end Parrish had etched three more plates. Largely self-taught, Parrish quickly demonstrated the drawing talent and adaptability needed to produce high quality etchings. His twelfth plate, entitled November, was selected for publication in the influential American Art Review by its editor S. R. Koehler. Parrish joined the New York Etching Club in 1880. On May 14th he met with four
other aspiring painter-etchers to found the Philadelphia Society of Etchers. A year later he joined the Royal Society of Painters and Etchers in London. Between 1880 and 1882, Parrish exhibited his etchings at eighteen major art exhibitions in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, London, Vienna, and Montreal. Through the wide exposure of his art at national and international shows, Parrish established his reputation as one of the foremost American painter-etchers.

Unfortunately there were too many poor reproductions produced by publishers attempting to cash in on the sudden demand for etchings. The quality etchings of the painter-etchers were swamped in the flood, and by 1890 dissatisfied art collectors turned away from buying original etchings. In 1892 Stephen Parrish laid away his etching tools and once again committed himself to painting full-time. The 168 etchings he produced are a lasting tribute to his talent and helped "establish the concept of the 'original print' as we know it today." From the onset of his etching career Parrish's talent was recognized and praised by the leading art critics of the day. In his very positive overview of Parrish's first forty plates, S. R. Koehler admired Parrish's ability to capture the moods that pervade nature. The art critic and editor of The Portfolio (London), Philip G. Hamerton, was particularly impressed by "the tonic simplicity of the plate" that completely captured the idea of the place in a few suggestive lines. In 1886, Ripley Hitchcock reviewed the Parrish etching exhibit at the Wunderlich Gallery in New York for the Art Review. Hitchcock's review closely examined Parrish's development as an etcher. In particular, Hitchcock noted that in the Bay of Fundy etchings "the figure becomes more prominent than before." With his New Brunswick series, Parrish had refined his technique to a high artistic level thus enabling him "to obtain brilliant effects of light and shade, and convey strong poetic feeling." The New Brunswick and Nova Scotia etchings and drawings of Stephen Parrish in the Dalhousie collections consist of fifty-eight preparatory drawings and thirteen completed etchings. Unlike many of his fellow painter-etchers, Parrish did not etch directly from nature. Instead he would "sketch it up in pencil first... then carefully work out the areas of value in the studio..." Parrish retained his preparatory sketches, so a century later we are in the unique position of being able to see the various stages of Parrish's creative process. While nineteen of the Dalhousie drawings are definitely incomplete, many of the pencil and india ink drawings are complete works of art in their own right. The drawings add to our understanding of the completed etchings as Parrish often used elements from various drawings to complete one etching. With their candid and simple lines the drawings exhibited here clearly document the social history of the period.

By May 1882, Parrish had completed half of his Maritime etchings. The strange shore effects had indeed worked their spell. The tides, the sweeping marsh meadows, and the rich hues of the late summer light provided Parrish with compelling subject matter. They provided him with the scope to explore his major artistic interest of "getting the darks and lights right" and of capturing the dynamics present in the endless juxtaposition of land, sea, and sky. The eleven Maritime etchings exhibited here clearly illustrate Parrish's success in presenting his vision, whether it be the dark, threatening waters of the Bay of Fundy illustrated in A Squall — Bay of Fundy (cat. 27) or the muted tones of a cold winter evening seen in A Winter Evening, Windsor, N.S. (cat. 52).

While vacationing at Bolton Landing, New York in 1879, Stephen Parrish met and befriended a young art student, Charles A. Platt. The following year Parrish introduced Platt to the etching technique. Platt proved to be an avid student and quickly developed his natural talent. In the late summer of 1881, Platt accompanied Parrish on his sketching tour of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Even though Platt was greatly influenced by his teacher, he developed his own distinct, flowing style. The four Platt etchings exhibited here are representative of his work and clearly demonstrate Platt's discerning eye for composition.

During the 1880's, Platt established himself as one of the foremost American printmakers and his etchings were particularly valued as book illustrations. After the collapse of the etching market in the early 1890's, Platt turned his talents to architecture and had a very successful second career as an architect and garden designer.

Karen Smith  
Head of Special Services  
Dalhousie University Library

Notes
4. Ibid., p.6.
15. Ibid., p.10.

Works in the Exhibition

Drawings are arranged chronologically according to Parrish's itinerary. Etchings are located following the preparatory drawings for the work. The completion dates and titles for these works are as documented in Stephen Parrish, "Record of Paintings and Etchings," MSS. Coll., Wm. Greenbaum, Mass.

All dimensions are in centimeters, height preceding width; measurements indicate the image size exclusive of titles or inscriptions for works with borders. Sheet dimensions are provided for the drawings without defined borders.
Stephen Maxfield Parrish (1846-1938)

1 Carleton, N.B. (St. John West), August 1881
   pencil (incomplete)
   37.5 x 54.5

2 Carleton, N.B.
   pencil and ink (incomplete)
   22.0 x 43.5
   Verso drawing: On Bay of Fundy Near St. John

3 Carleton, N.B., August 1881
   pencil and ink
   38.0 x 56.5

4 On St. John River at Carleton
   pencil with gouache highlights
   33.5 x 47.0

5 Mills at Mistpeck
   etching, drypoint added and printed on vellum
   Philadelphia, 1884
   21.2 x 28.0

6 Portland, N.B. (St. John North), August 1881
   pencil with gouache highlights
   39.0 x 23.0

7 Portland, N.B., August 1881
   pencil (incomplete)
   31.0 x 52.5

8 Boatyards on St. John River
   etching
   Philadelphia, 1886
   6.0 x 11.5

9 St. John, N.B. — Low Tide
   pencil with wash (incomplete)
   47.5 x 37.5

10 Market Slip, St. John, N.B., August 1881
    pencil (incomplete)
    38.0 x 56.0

11 Market Slip, St. John, N.B.
    ink with wash and gouache highlights
    54.5 x 38.0

12 Weirs — Harbor of St. John, N.B.
    pencil and ink with gouache highlights
    30.0 x 50.0

13 Wood Boat, St. John Harbor
    pencil and wash (incomplete)
    26.0 x 24.0

14 On Navy Island — Low Tide
    pencil with wash highlights
    21.0 x 33.5
    Verso drawing: Untitled (Sketch of Fishing Boat) (incomplete)

15 Harbor, St. John
    pencil
    37.8 x 54.5
    Verso drawing: On Navy Island, St. John Harbor, N.B., August 1881

16 On Navy Island, St. John Harbor
    pencil (incomplete)
    38.6 x 56.0
    Verso drawing: On Navy Island, St. John Harbor, August 1881

17 On Navy Island, St. John Harbor
    pencil with gouache highlights
    26.5 x 48.0

18 Old Farm near St. John, N.B.
    pencil with gouache highlights
    23.4 x 34.7

19 Mouth of St. John River, N.B.
    ink
    25.5 x 35.5

20 St. John, N.B. — Looking down the River
    ink
    24.0 x 35.3

21 Wood Boats on the St. John River, N.B.
    etching, drypoint added and printed on Japanese tissue
    n.p., early 1882
    12.3 x 27.5

22 Mill on the upper St. John
    pencil
    25.3 x 35.0

23 Indian House Pool, Restigouche River, N.B.
    etching
    Philadelphia, 1886
    11.0 x 17.5

24 A Fishing-Hamlet — Bay of Fundy
    etching, drypoint added
    n.p., spring 1882
    13.5 x 21.0

25 Low Tide — Bay of Fundy
    etching, drypoint added
    n.p., fall 1881
    29.5 x 47.0

26 Untitled (Wharf Scene)
    pencil (incomplete)
    15.0 x 26.5

27 A Squall — Bay of Fundy
    etching, drypoint added
    Philadelphia, 1888
    33.6 x 55.5

28 Annapolis, N.S., September 1881
    pencil
    38.0 x 54.4

29 Annapolis N.S., August 1881
    pencil
    37.3 x 54.5
    Verso drawing: Annapolis, N.S., August 1881

30 Annapolis, N.S., September 1881
    ink and pencil (incomplete)
    38.5 x 55.7
    Verso drawing: Granville, N.S., September 1881

31 The Dykes, Annapolis, N.S., August 1881
    pencil with gouache highlights
    30.0 x 50.0
32 From Goat Island — Annapolis
   pencil (incomplete)
   38.0 × 54.5
   Verso drawing: Untitled (shoreline
   sketch on Goat Island)

33 The Meadows, Annapolis, N.S., August
   1881
   pencil with gouache highlights
   29.0 × 50.0

34 Annapolis, N.S., September 1881 (The
   Meadows of Grand Pré)
   pencil with gouache highlights
   37.8 × 54.5

35 Untitled (Front View of Former Judge
   Haliburton’s House, Round Hill,
   Annapolis Co.)
   ink and pencil (incomplete)
   26.0 × 39.6
   Verso drawing: Round Hill, Annapolis,
   N.S.

36 The Village-Street
   pencil and gouache highlights
   11.0 × 17.0

37 Old Tide Mills, Annapolis River, N.S.,
   September 1881
   pencil and ink with wash highlights
   38.0 × 56.0

38 Untitled (Cornwallis)
   pencil (incomplete)
   38.0 × 56.2
   Verso drawing: Untitled (sketch of a
   farmhouse)

39 The Dykes, Cornwallis, September 1881
   pencil
   29.0 × 48.9

40 Meadows, Cornwallis
   pencil
   38.0 × 53.0
   Verso drawing: Outside the Dykes,
   Cornwallis Meadows

41 In Cornwallis Valley
   etching, printed on Japanese tissue
   n.p., May 1882
   14.0 × 33.0

42 Meadows of Grand Pré
   pencil
   8.5 × 21.5

43 Meadows of Grand Pré, September 1881
   pencil with gouache highlights
   26.0 × 53.5

44 Near Granville, N.S.
   pencil and gouache highlights
   29.0 × 23.5
   Verso drawing: Untitled (sketch of
   oxen)

45 Meteghan, N.S.
   pencil and gouache highlights
   23.5 × 35.5
   Verso drawing: Untitled (sketch of
   barnyard)

46 Basin of Minas — Low Tide
   ink with ink wash and gouache
   highlights
   30.0 × 44.0

47 Pubnico, N.S.
   pencil (incomplete)
   25.0 × 35.0

48 Pubnico, N.S.
   ink and pencil
   25.5 × 35.5
   Verso drawing: Market Town, S. W.
   Nova Scotia

49 Judge Haliburton’s House (Sam Slick)
   Back View
   pencil with gouache highlights
   37.6 × 54.5
   Verso drawing: Grand Pré — Nova
   Scotia, September 1881

50 Windsor, N.S.
   pencil and ink with gouache highlights
   10.0 × 18.6

51 A Winter Day — Windsor, N.S.
   etching
   Philadelphia, 1887
   15.0 × 20.2

52 A Winter Evening — Windsor, N.S.
   etching, drypoint added
   n.p., 1883
   17.5 × 29.5

53 Old Inn Yard, Wolfville, N.S.,
   September 1881
   pencil
   38.0 × 54.4

54 In Nova Scotia
   pencil and ink
   33.0 × 48.0

55 A Nova Scotian Solitude
   pencil and ink
   21.0 × 42.0

56 Old Acadian Inn Yard
   etching, drypoint added and printed
   on vellum
   n.p., 1882
   22.2 × 31.2

57 An Old Homestead
   pencil and ink (incomplete)
   26.0 × 36.5

58 On the Saguenay River, Quebec
   etching
   n.p., n.d.
   10.0 × 21.0

59 Near Quebec
   etching, drypoint added
   n.p., n.d.
   14.0 × 24.0

Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933)

60 A Corner of Portland
   etching
   n.p., 1882
   26.0 × 21.0

61 Untitled (Windsor, N.S.)
   etching
   n.p., 1882
   10.5 × 22.0

62 Old Houses at Windsor, N.S.
   etching, drypoint added
   n.p., 1881
   21.5 × 39.5

63 Untitled (A Provincial Fishing Village,
   Canada)
   etching
   n.p., 1882
   6.6 × 12.5

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