

Page from the Log Book of the USS *Harriet Lane* and Painting by Thomas P. Rossiter, Related to the Prince of Wales's 1860 Visit to Mount Vernon

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On June 21, 1860, British Foreign Minister Lord John Russell sent a letter to U.S. Ambassador George M. Dallas about the much-anticipated visit of the Prince of Wales to North America later in the summer. In his letter, Lord Russell explained,

His Royal Highness will, on leaving British soil, lay aside all Royal State and exchange his title, as he has done on former journeys to foreign countries[,] for that of Lord Renfrew. While thus dispensing with any ceremony which might be inconvenient to the communities which he hopes to visit, he trusts to be enabled, as a private gentleman to employ the small amount of time at his disposal in the study of the most interesting objects in the United States and of the ordinary life of the American People.

So, after spending nearly two months on an official state visit to the British possessions of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick—celebrating their coming union as the new Dominion of Canada—18-year-old Prince Albert Edward traveled to the United States as a “private gentleman,” known as Lord Renfrew. Though free from ceremonial requirements, the eldest son of Queen Victoria and heir to the British throne traveled with numerous official companions.

The well-accompanied Lord Renfrew began his exploration of the United States on September 20 in Detroit, and by the time he reached Washington, D.C., 13 days later, he had visited Chicago and a farm in Livingston County, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Altoona, Pennsylvania. Along the way, he met civic

and social leaders, attended religious services, visited museums, went to state fairs, toured capital buildings, attended grand balls, and more.

He traveled primarily by train, and everywhere was met by large crowds. When he left Pittsburgh, reports estimated that 10,000 people saw him off at the train station.

Both the domestic and international press covered his odyssey in great detail. Articles about Lord Renfrew's travels became so popular that in New York newspapers the coverage threatened to crowd out other big stories, including ones about the presidential election campaign.

He arrived in Washington, D.C., on the evening of October 3, and the *New York Times* reported the next day that “Many greeted his appearance with cheers.” While in the nation's capital, he

spent three nights at the White House, toured the Capitol building, attended a state dinner given in his honor, had dinner at the British ambassador's residence, and watched fireworks.

On Friday, October 5, he took a day-long excursion aboard the newly christened, 270-foot revenue cutter USS *Harriet Lane* to Mount Vernon, the ancestral home of George Washington. He was accompanied by President James Buchanan; Harriet Lane, who served as the “First Lady” for her bachelor uncle; members of the president's cabinet including Secretary of State General Lewis Cass, Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, Attorney General Judge J.S. Black, Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, and Secretary of the Treasury Howell Cobb; heads of departments; members of the military; their wives and daughters; and others.

According to the ship's log (featured in this article), the group boarded the vessel at 10:30AM, and following a 21-gun salute in honor of the prince, at 11AM proceeded down the Potomac River to Mount Vernon. They arrived at 12:30PM and spent nearly three hours at the mansion. There, the group toured the grounds, planted a commemorative tree, and visited the tomb of General Washington, before returning to Washington, D.C.

One year later, the American artist Thomas Prichard Rossiter (1818–1871)

Thursday Oct 4th 1860
Commences with sun & light from the N^W & E^W &
overcast. - At daylight the same,
Crew employed getting the ship ready to
receive the Prince of Wales and the President of the
United States.

Drilled the crew at Quarters and at
manning the yards.

At midday weather the same.
Latter part light air from the E^W with
drizzling rain.

Ends with light air from the E^W
and cloudy.

Served 50 rations } Charles B. Bennett 3rd Lt

Friday Oct 5th 1860
Commences with light air from the E^W & cloudy.

At daylight light air from the S^W & clear.

At 10.30 AM the President of the United States, ac-
companied by the Prince of Wales with their suite, came
on board to be conveyed to Mount Vernon - The
Yards were manned, and a salute of 31 guns fired
in honor of our distinguished visitors, and the
vessel at 11 AM proceeded down the Potomac River -
At 3.30 PM came to anchor off Mount Vernon and
landed our passengers at the wharf.

At 3.15 PM again received our company
on board, got underway and stood up the river & at
6 PM landed them at the Washington Arsenal with the
same honors as at their arrival.

At 6.30 PM secured the ship alongside the Arsenal
wharf.

Latter part and ends light southerly air and
clear.

Served 50 rations } D. C. Constable 2nd Lt



Thomas P. Rossiter, *Visit of the Prince of Wales, President Buchanan, and Dignitaries to the Tomb of Washington at Mount Vernon, October 1860*, 1861, oil on canvas, 27 ¼ × 54 ¾ in., Smithsonian American Art Museum

finished a large horizontal oil painting that captured both the importance and solemnity of a portion of this visit. Titled *Visit of the Prince of Wales, President Buchanan, and Dignitaries to the Tomb of Washington at Mount Vernon, October 1860*, and featured in this article, Rossiter carefully arranged the composition so that the scene depicted is before the Washington mausoleum—a pointed arched vault, surrounded by a brick wall—on the painting’s left. A barely visible inscription on the plaque above the arch reveals this location to the viewer, reading “Within this enclosure/ Rest/The remains of/General George Washington.”

A history and religious painter by training, Rossiter presents a who’s who of the dignitaries attending the historic event; the first official visit of a member of the British royal family to the United States. Almost all of the 45 individuals shown in this scene have been identified. Among them are the Prince of Wales and President Buchanan, who stand apart from the crowd on the path directly in front of the arched gate, hats in their hands, with their heads tilting slightly towards Washington’s tomb, as if paying respect. Closest to the prince on the left side of the painting is Lord Lyons (grandson of George III), standing near Harriet Lane, who holds an open parasol that shades her face. Next to Miss Lane are “ladies of the party.” On the right of the painting, other elegantly dressed men and women gather, some gazing in the direction of the mausoleum while others look directly at the viewer. These individuals are assembled before the obelisks that denote the graves of Washington’s family members. Standing closest to the president is the Duke of Newcastle, who is framed between thick green trees. He stands next to the U.S. secretary of state, who in turn is next to the secretary of

the Navy. Behind the figures on the far right, in the background almost hidden by trees, are five red-coated Marine bandsmen playing instruments. Way off in the distance, one can see the river with small sailboats and a side-wheel steamer. A cloud hovers between the trees in the middle of the painting, and if one looks closely, it resembles a profile of Washington’s face. Perhaps the artist is implying that the first president was present, in spirit, at the event. The ceremonial visit to Mount Vernon was thought of at the time as not only a tribute to Washington as a man and leader, but as symbolic of reconciliation between England and its former colonies.

Following the visit to Mount Vernon, the prince’s travels in the United States continued for two more weeks. He visited Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, West Point, Albany, and Boston—where he met the last living American survivor of the Battle of Bunker Hill. On October 20, he and his party left for Great Britain from Portland, Maine.

Additional information about the painting and its donor:

Although the circumstances of the painting’s execution are unclear, as there is no evidence or known records of a government contract or commission, Thomas P. Rossiter, nonetheless, may have been asked to create this painting. According to the New York press, the idea of a painting commemorating the event was discussed at the time. “The government has ordered from Rossiter an historical picture of the prince and Mr. Buchanan standing at the tomb of Washington.” (*New York Times*, October 19, 1860). Irrespective of whether the painting was commissioned or not, we do know that the Prince of Wales and members of his entourage met with Rossiter on October 13, 1860, at the National Portrait Gallery (the name of

photographer Mathew Brady’s New York studio), “where he [the prince] stood for a full-length figure in the attitude desired by the painter.” (*The Home Journal*, New York, November 3, 1860, Vol. 2:5.) An albumen silver print (carte de visite) of *Albert Edward, Prince of Wales* is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, and the glass plate negative of the photograph is in the holdings of the National Archives. The image was used by Rossiter as a basis for the prince’s likeness in this painting.

The painting is signed in red in the lower right corner, “T.P. Rossiter/1861.” It was donated to the Smithsonian Institution in 1906 as a bequest of Harriet Lane (now, Harriet Lane Johnston), who was not only present at the depicted event, but was responsible for the comforts and entertainment of the royal party while they were at the White House. She also donated to the Smithsonian several related works, including a portrait painting of *James Buchanan* by Jacob Eichholtz (1906.9.5), two portrait sculptures of *James Buchanan* by Henry Dexter (XX4 and 1906.9.4), a watercolor on ivory miniature portrait painting of *James Buchanan* by John Henry Brown (1906.9.2), a portrait painting of *The Prince of Wales (King Edward VII)* by Sir John Watson Gordon (1906.9.6), and two letters to U.S. President James Buchanan from Queen Victoria regarding the visit of the Prince of Wales to the United States: one from June 22, 1860 (1906.9.30), and the other from November 19, 1860 (1906.9.31A-B). 📄

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NOTE ABOUT THE DOCUMENT: The log for the revenue cutter *Harriet Lane*, October 4–5, 1860, comes from Letters from Revenue Cutter Officers, 1858-1941 (Entry NC31-159A); and is in Records of the United States Coast Guard, 1785-1988, Record Group 26; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. It is available online from the National Archives at www.DocsTeach.org. The authors would like to thank archivist Mark Molan for his assistance in locating the document.

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TEACHING ACTIVITIES

1. Distribute copies of (or project) both the featured document and artwork to students. Begin a class discussion by focusing attention on the page from the logbook. Ask one student to read it aloud while the others follow along. Pose the following questions: What type of document is it? What is the date of the document? Who was the intended recipient? Who created it? For what purpose? Next, direct students to study the artwork. Project a digital image of the painting on a wall in your classroom if possible (open americanart.si.edu/images/1906/1906.9.18_1a.jpg), and ask them to hypothesize what the artwork has to do with the logbook page. Pose the following questions: What is going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? Now, compare the two.
2. Tell students that on October 4, 1860, the *New York Times* announced, “No one can accuse the prince of laziness,” and proceeded to describe the fast pace of the prince’s schedule. Inform them that during the one month that the prince was in the United States, he traveled to Detroit, Mich.; Chicago, and a farm in Livingston County, Ill.; St. Louis, Mo.; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Altoona, Penn.; Washington, D.C.; Mount Vernon and Richmond, Va.; Baltimore, Md.; Philadelphia, Penn.; New York, West Point, and Albany, N.Y.; Boston, Mass.; and Portland, Maine. Direct them to a map or to an online mapping service and ask them to calculate roughly how many miles the prince traveled; hypothesize about the modes of transportation he used to get from place to place in 1860; and consider why these particular locations were included. Lead a class discussion during which students can share their findings, and describe how they think a similar visit might differ today.
3. Share information with students from the background essay about the prince’s travels and the many places that he visited. Then, ask them why they think Rossiter may have created a painting depicting a particular event in the prince’s three-day trip to Washington, D.C.—the visit to George Washington’s tomb. Record their responses on the board. Encourage students to choose another significant moment during the visit of the Prince of Wales, or in American diplomatic history and create an artwork of their own. For inspiration, they can do a keyword search in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum at americanart.si.edu/collections/search/. Students can create a sketch, a painting, a sculpture, or other art form. Host an art show featuring their completed works with captions explaining their event choice.
4. Direct students to conduct biographical research about the individuals included in the painting (ideally, assign each student a different person). Project a digital image of the painting on a wall in your classroom and invite students to step into the projected image of the individual whom they researched and share their findings with the class. Ask them to take on the role of their participant and tell the class about themselves using the first-person voice. For example, the student assigned to research President Buchanan might begin by saying, “I am James Buchanan, Jr., the 15th president of the United States...”
5. Divide students into seven groups and assign each group one of the following topics:
 - a. Journalism in the United States and overseas in 1860
 - b. The creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1860
 - c. The Presidential Election Campaign of 1860
 - d. Diplomatic visits to the United States prior to 1860
 - e. Harriet Lane and the USS *Harriet Lane*
 - f. Prince Albert Edward
 - g. Mount Vernon

Ask students to brainstorm a list of how they think their topics might relate to one another. Encourage them to conduct research about their topic to confirm or refute their hypotheses. Ask them whether the connections they found surprised them; whether the connections suggested links to other issues, events, or individuals; and what sources they used for their information. [The “Making Connections” tool available from the www.DocsTeach.org website may be useful for this type of activity.]
6. Write the words “National Identity” on the board and ask students what they think the phrase means. Remind students that the prince’s visit came 77 years after the end of the American Revolution and less than seven months before the start of the Civil War. Divide the class into thirds. Ask one-third of the class to write a one-page essay describing how Americans might have defined their “National Identity” in 1783, at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolution. Ask the second third to write a one-page essay about “National Identity” at the time of the prince’s visit in 1860; and ask the final third to write a one-page essay describing how Americans might have defined their “National Identity” five years later, at the end of the Civil War. Encourage students to share their essays with one another.
7. Following the prince’s return to England, the British newspapers announced that the annual gold medal given for the encouragement of English poetry for undergraduates at the University of Cambridge would be awarded for the best poem on “The Prince of Wales at the Tomb of Washington”; not to exceed 200 lines in length. Ask students to use the painting, the logbook, or other historical accounts of the prince’s visit as the inspiration for their own poem on this historical event. As an extension, invite students to read and discuss the 1861 poem by R.J. de Cordova titled “The Prince’s Visit: A Humorous Description” available from archive.org and excerpted below.

Now I’m not superstitious, have no faith in ghosts;
Don’t believe in the rappings of angelic hosts;
But that WASHINGTON’S spirit was there to receive
This offering of peace, I am free to believe;
And I know, if it witnessed the scene by that grave,
That the soul of the great man forgot and forgave.

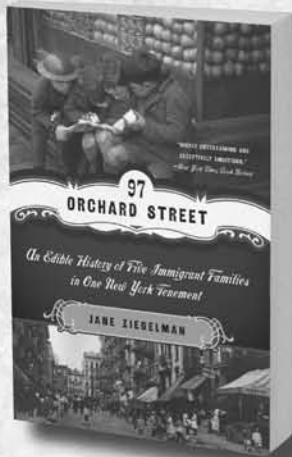
For further reading:

Henry James Morgan, *The Tour of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales through British America and the United States* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1861). Segments of this book are available online through The Civil War Search Engine at Dickinson College. See: hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/.

Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

For information on Mount Vernon, see www.mountvernon.org.

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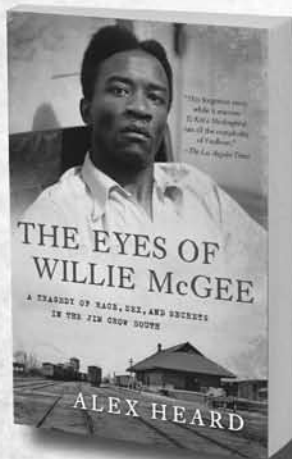
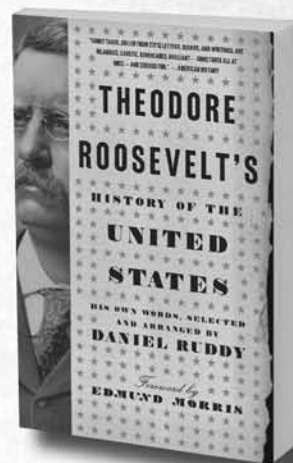
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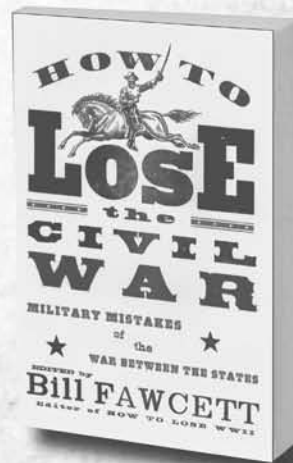
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