

238 Putnam Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
April 26, 2003

Peter J. Kloman  
American Paintings and Sculpture  
Christie's  
20 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10020

Dear Mr. Kloman:

RE: Eastman Johnson, Grand Portage--Lake Superior, oil on canvas, 9 7/8 x 22 5/8 inches (my measurements). Inscribed lower right "E.J." in pencil (?). You are calling the painting Ojibwe Encampment, but I prefer to title it "Grand Portage--Lake Superior."

I examined the painting at Christie's on April 18, 2003. In my opinion the work is by the genre painter Jonathan Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), and I will include it in my catalogue raisonné. I would date the painting circa 1857.

The work seems to be the same painting that was sold at the estate sale of Johnson's work on February 27, 1907, held at the American Art Galleries in New York City. The catalogue entry was No. 92, and it reads:

#### GRAND PORTAGE--LAKE SUPERIOR

This is a study of a populous Indian encampment on the shores of the great lake, showing a number of birch bark tepees and huts ranged along near the water's edge, with Indian squaws and braves in gay-colored blankets engaged in various occupations and strolling over the open fields near their habitations. In the left foreground are the base and entrance of a large wig-wam with a colored skin hung over the doorway, and in front of it, on the extreme right, are the remains of a fire with two forked saplings and a connecting branch to support a kettle. The level line of the broad expanse of water forms the horizon, broken on the left by a low, wooded hill.

Signed at the lower right, E. J. Height, 9 inches; length, 22 1/2 inches

When we examined the back of the frame, we noted "92" inscribed on the frame itself.

According to my records, after the estate sale the painting went to Mr. William B. Cogswell, a cousin of Johnson's (who bought several works from the estate sale) and then to the Misses E. Pearl and Elizabeth Browning. I believe that Norman Hirschl acquired it from them.

Johnson went to Superior, Wisconsin, in the summer of 1856 to visit his sister Sarah and her husband, William Newton. Johnson's brother Reuben was also in Superior, which was booming at the time. All three of the men were involved in land speculation, but Johnson, in particular, took an interest in the Ojibwe living in the Superior area. He returned to Washington D.C., but returned again in 1857. The majority of his sketches and oil paintings come from the 1857 period. Grand Portage is located on the west shore of Lake Superior near the Canadian border.

The painting was included in the Brooklyn Museum exhibition of 1940, An American Genre Painter, Eastman Johnson, 1824-1906, that was organized by John I. H. Baur. It is listed as No. 18 in Baur's checklist of known Johnson works that was published at the end of the catalogue.

The oil painting you have is one of the larger paintings from his sojourn to the Duluth/Superior area and is very finely painted. The representation of three-dimensional space is convincing as are the details of the skin-covered lodging, dirt path, grasses, distant structures and figures, the lake itself and the distant land mass. Characteristic of Johnson are the deft touches of light along the left edges of the figures that adds to the convincing spacial construction. As the figures recede they become less definite, which is also convincing.

We examined the painting with an ultra-violet light. The condition looks good; there may have been a light varnishing at some point (perhaps when the dealer Norman Hirschl owned it).

If you have further questions, do not hesitate to get in touch with me. And I would like to encourage the new owner to let me know his/her identity.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills

Author, Eastman Johnson, 1972  
and co-author, Eastman  
Painting America, 1999

Johnson:

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My email address is: pathills@bu.edu