

238 Putnam Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
June 29, 1990

Marty Scherer  
Marty Scherer Fine Paintings  
P. O. Box 480  
Mount Vernon, NY 10551

Dear Mr. Scherer:

Re: Eastman Johnson, painting of Union soldiers accepting drinks from an African-American woman, oil on canvas, 10-3/4 x 15-1/5 inches. Not signed. Not dated.

As you know, I examined this painting on June 19, 1990, at my home here in Cambridge. It is beautifully painted, the subject is most unusual, and, in my opinion, it was painted by the American genre painter Eastman Johnson. I also examined the painting using an ultra-violet light, but my findings were inconclusive. There has perhaps been some touch-up here and there, but in general the surface looks good.

The painting has the characteristics typical of Johnson's best paintings. The textures are skillfully rendered (eg. boards of the "inn," stone wall, ground, leaves, grass, and the trousers of the soldiers), the colors sparkle, the modeling of the figures is true to life, and the massing of lights and darks is convincing. Small details are also typical of what one might find in a Johnson picture: the flattened squirrel skin hung on the side of the house, the glint of yellow on the handle of the right soldier's rifle, the averted face of the soldier on the left, the rendering of the glass being tilted back by the right soldier, the expression of hospitality expressed by the African-American woman.

The painting is particularly fascinating because of its subject matter. During the Civil War Johnson followed the Union troops and several paintings resulted from the experience, The Wounded Drummer Boy, of which there are several versions, but the most notable is the one owned by the Union League Club, New York City; Civil War Scene, Brooklyn Museum, The Field Hospital, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and The Ride for Liberty--The Fugitive Slaves, Brooklyn Museum. He also did several pictures focused on home-front activities, such as Writing to Father, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

With further research through my records I found that at the estate sale held of Johnson's pictures in 1907 there was sold (Lot No. 128) a picture with a similar setting. I quote from that catalogue:

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DINNERTIME AND APPLETIME IN OLD VIRGINIA

In the right foreground is the corner of a wooden house, which stands on a stone wall laid without

mortar, and in the doorway stands a negro woman blowing a tin horn, apparently summoning the men to dinner. An apple tree, laden with fruit, and an arch of climbing roses and other vines cast a broad shadow across the foreground, through which a tiny brook runs over a rocky bed. In the middle distance is seen an old-fashioned garden, with sunflowers and vegetables, all in brilliant sunlight, and beyond a vista over a meadow to a blue hill in the horizon.

Height, 22 inches; length, 25 1/2 inches.

\* \* \* \* \*

The description of the setting exactly matches the painting you brought to me; only the black woman seems to be there alone and she is blowing on a dinner horn.

Given the information I now have, I can only speculate that Johnson painted this small finished picture with plans to enlarge it. Perhaps it was painted in the mid-1860s (just before the end of the war or right after it) and later he decided not to pursue it as a subject because of its political message--a slave woman aiding Union soldiers. Johnson, like other artists of his generation, were sympathetic to slaves and to the newly emancipated freedmen. Some artists even painted pictures that were integrated scenes of blacks and whites. But about 1867-68 the focus shifted away from such issues and artists like as Johnson went on to other subjects. These very issues intrigue me and will be the topic of my next book. I am particularly interested in the role of the young black girl who stands watching in the shadow, for she is that next generation who was ignored by northern liberals such as Johnson. Please, therefore, let me know what happens to this painting.

I hope this has been helpful.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hills  
Art Historian and author of  
Eastman Johnson, 1972

P.S. I hope that no further restoration is done on this painting. The figures looks very good.